

The Ismailis, among whom are the followers of the Aga Khan, first rose to prominence during the fourth Islamic/tenth Christian century. Even in this early period they developed a remarkable intellectual program to sustain and support their Shiite cause. Along with their own version of true Islam, they promoted the investigation of science and philosophy, thus successfully merging the demands of religious tradition and the then newly imported sciences from abroad. The high watermark of this scholarly movement is best illustrated in the writings of the Ismaili theoretician Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, who applied Neoplatonic ideas and language to his own Ismailism in order to explain both the universe at large and humanity's unique place within it.

Using published and manuscript writings of al-Sijistānī which have hitherto been largely hidden or ignored, Dr. Paul Walker reveals this scholar's major contributions to the development of a philosophical Shiism. He analyzes al-Sijistānī's role in the Ismaili mission (*da'wa*) and critically assesses the value of his combination of philosophy and religious doctrine. The principal themes covered include God, creation, intellect, soul, nature, the human being, prophecy, interpretation and salvation.

*Early philosophical Shiism* presents the first book-length study of the ideas and teachings of this leading tenth-century figure. It will, therefore, be widely read by students and specialists in Islamic history and medieval philosophy and will also be of great interest to the modern Ismaili community.



*Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization*

Early philosophical Shiism

# *Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization*

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# Early philosophical Shiism

The Ismaili Neoplatonism of  
Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī

PAUL E. WALKER



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To  
Adam, Katrina, and Jeremy





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## Preface

The principal purpose of this book is to introduce a critically important Shiite writer from the fourth (Islamic)/tenth (Christian) century to a general, modern audience. This is an especially difficult task because the person in question, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, remains little known in the scholarly literature about Muslim thinkers or even in the discussions of Islamic thought by Muslims themselves. His contribution to the development of philosophical Shiism in his time was crucial; yet almost no record of him and no overtly recognizable trace of his thought much outlasted the century in which he lived. His works did not find a place in standard Islamic collections, but were copied and preserved by a small remnant of the once much more powerful and larger Ismaili movement to which he belonged. Increasingly, his writings fell into a dark obscurity as they were guarded from outsiders, only to be rediscovered by modern scholars in the second half of the twentieth century.

Al-Sijistānī, however, in his ardent support of a particular version of Shiism and in his intense pursuit of philosophical and scientific fact to explain and complement these religious views, was not born or bred in such obscurity. His role in the early Ismaili *da'wa* did not limit or confine his interests or his audience. The intellectual activities that created his thinking brought together a complex and sophisticated cosmology, a fully elaborated doctrine of man and history, and a philosophical account of prophecy and other matters, which derives from a thorough knowledge of both Shiite Islam and Greek Neoplatonism. Al-Sijistānī's productive synthesis of these radically differing traditions might seem natural in the context of western Christianity but within Islam his effort in this regard stands apart, branding him with various forms of heresy and deviation. His aim was high, however, and the surviving evidence of his thought, as it is preserved in the works now available, reveals a brilliant mind – one fully and openly conversant with issues and solutions that, in his time, were a part of Islamic civilization in general, not just of relevance to the peculiar teachings of a marginal sect.

The concerns raised and the answers given by al-Sijistānī thus belong to the whole of the best Islamic scholarly tradition. Perhaps this is most clearly proven in the life of the great philosopher–physician, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), whose own autobiography confesses to the Ismaili loyalties of his family. Indeed, although the

possible direct influence of al-Sijistānī on Ibn Sīnā has yet to be studied or worked out in detail, it remains in theory not only possible but highly likely. Ibn Sīnā's father and brother both adhered to the Ismaili view and followed its doctrines and he himself reports that they used to speak in front of him about the intellect and the soul in an Ismaili manner. Such discussions must have followed, for the greater part, the teachings of none other than al-Sijistānī, who would have been the most prominent and, therefore, most influential Ismaili writer of that era.

Moreover, within the Ismaili domain – a realm which once encompassed territories as diverse as Egypt, North Africa, Arabia, Bahrain, and parts of Iran and India – al-Sijistānī's formulation of a philosophical view of Islamic doctrine achieved such prominence that it retained supremacy, despite credible intellectual challenges, until the end of the Fatimid caliphate, some two hundred years after the decades during which he was at the height of his productivity and influence. Even later the ghost of his ideas continued to haunt the discourse of the Ismailis and others and to burden such great figures of subsequent periods as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, who once wrote treatises in support of the Ismaili cause, and possibly Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, who like some other anti-establishment authors was accused of subscribing to their doctrines.

Indeed there have been a significant number of major Islamic thinkers who had to face a similar accusation. But because the real philosophical foundation of Ismailism has not, until now, been properly understood and thoroughly appreciated, why this tended to happen has made little sense. Surely, however, although the later scholars within Islam may not have known al-Sijistānī by name, they nevertheless often recognized a particular tendency within the intellectual tradition and labeled it "Ismaili" precisely because it reflected the position once so forcefully espoused by him. Now to reveal that position in its full details without question gives meaning to an investigation of these charges and explains why the Ismaili interpretation of Islam was frequently seen by their enemies as both intensely profound and also intellectually dangerous.

It is, accordingly, highly important that the surviving evidence about Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī be made available to a wide audience. That, however, is no simple task, and in the nearly total absence of any previous attempt to do so, the difficulties are compounded. Since none of al-Sijistānī's works has been translated into English (let alone properly edited and published in Arabic), none can be referred to in any study of them without recourse to the original texts (or, in one case, to a Persian and French translation; in another, to a partial French translation). Readers not skilled in Arabic will have no way to sample the actual material of al-Sijistānī's books or the flow of his thoughts and ideas. It seems imperative, therefore, to begin to translate the books of al-Sijistānī. However, each of the existing treatises presents a host of unique textual and interpretive problems: the manuscripts are hard to obtain, the language in them obscure, the printed versions all faulty to one degree or another. And no single example well illustrates the whole range of concerns and interests of its author, nor explains at all adequately the background and context of his ideas.

These dilemmas dictated the form and method utilized in this study. To introduce the work of al-Sijistānī, both as literature and as thought, the following volume consists of two parts, which in effect together constitute an introduction to his writings. Each, however, is to a degree independent of the other since they aim in different directions. Part I offers a detailed review of al-Sijistānī's position with respect to the intellectual world which he inherited and which he attempted to shape to his own liking. The key elements which formed him are Shiism and philosophy and each has its separate career prior to their coming together in early Ismaili thought. The second part presents the teachings of al-Sijistānī primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of philosophy. Based on a comprehensive review of his own writings, it employs a broad, critical perspective by avoiding the limitations of individual texts or particular statements in them. A future project remains the translation of one or more of these texts. In this instance, however, the accuracy of al-Sijistānī's own statements depends on a critical analysis of the material preserved in the manuscript tradition of his Ismaili descendants. For each of his works those materials were consulted. The careful preservation of his words over the intervening 1,000 years since his death by the scribes and copyists deserves the kind of recognition and attention this study hopes to focus on the subject of their devotion and labor.

These varying approaches ought to make al-Sijistānī understandable in such a way that each serves as a complement to the other, and ultimately enlarges the reader's appreciation of him and the various intellectual roles he chose to play. Perhaps this study will also entice others into continuing such investigations, either into the other Shiite thinkers of his time and place or into al-Sijistānī himself, whose contributions are in no way exhausted by this volume. At a minimum, if al-Sijistānī is no longer ignored as an active participant in the field of either Islamic philosophy or of Shiite thought, this book will have achieved a significant end.

## Acknowledgments

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## Note on transliteration

I have adopted a number of key Arabic terms as common English words which is what I believe they have become through regular use. The most important of these are Ismaili for *Ismā'īlī*, Shiah and Shiite for *Shī'ā* and *Shī'ī*, Imami, Sunni, and Zaydi for *Imāmī*, *Sunnī*, and *Zaydī*. Otherwise the transliteration system used is that of the *Arabic–English Dictionary* of Hans Wehr as edited by J. M. Cowan.

## Abbreviations

<i>Maqālīd</i>	<i>Kitāb al-maqālīd</i>
<i>Yanābī'</i>	<i>Kitāb al-yanābī'</i>
<i>Ithbāt</i>	<i>Ithbāt al-nubūwa</i>
<i>Ifṭikhār</i>	<i>Kitāb al-iftikhār</i>
<i>Sullam</i>	<i>Sullam al-najāt</i>
<i>Tuḥfa</i>	<i>Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn</i>
<i>Kashf</i>	<i>Kashf al-mahjūb</i>
<i>Idāḥ</i>	<i>Kitāb al-idāḥ</i>
<i>Kashf asrār</i>	<i>Min Kashf asrār al-bāṭinīya wa ghawar madhhabihim</i>
<i>Riyāḍ</i>	<i>Kitāb al-riyāḍ</i>
<i>A'lām</i>	<i>A'lām al-nubūwa</i>
<i>Iṣlāḥ</i>	<i>Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EP<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition</i>
<i>Elranica</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>



**PART I**

**Al-Sijistānī's heritage**



## **The Ismaili message and its philosophers**

The balance between Sunni and Shiah Islam changed dramatically at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century with the rise to power of the Fatimids in North Africa and with the success of related movements, such as the Qarmatians, in other provinces of the Muslim empire. For a while Shiism enjoyed an ascendancy that eventually culminated in the latter part of the same century with Buyid control of Baghdad, Hamdanid domination in Aleppo and Fatimid rule in Cairo. Each of these movements espoused a form of Shiite religious ideology. Unfortunately, while the superficial facts of these political developments are available in the standard Arabic chronicles, the underlying doctrinal theories of these and other Shiite groups of the period are not. A complete account of Shiism ought to include details of the thoughts and activities of its partisans, especially those with a claim to positions of influence and leadership. However, the literature of Shiism, as well as its authors, from the critical turning point in the sect's history continue to exist in obscurity.

The theoretical concepts involved tend to be clear enough. Shiism, in direct contrast to Sunnism, holds that there necessarily exists a divinely ordained, supreme human authority in all religious matters. During his lifetime, the prophet occupied this office: his ruling on any issue was for all intents and purposes that of God Himself. No question of interpretation or problem of clarification in the realms of thought or action could be decided without direct or indirect recourse to this fountainhead of truth, who was in fact the very source of God's instructions to mankind. After the death of Muḥammad, in the absence of this ultimate verification of the divine message, another method had to be found to insure that the proper orientation and guidance of individual men and their community would not suffer a turn towards error. Since Shiite doctrine maintains that man alone and by himself inevitably goes astray, human effort in and of itself cannot provide knowledge of the correct path and, therefore, lead the way to God and salvation. It is not sufficient that men simply rediscover or recover the exact form or content of the prophet's teaching in every specific case. There must also exist, by divine right, a continuation of at least a portion of the original link between man and God, much as it was when the prophet still lived. In other words, the world at all times must have a prophetically inspired person who, as heir of the prophet himself,

carries on the principle of his rule in all those matters where his authority was once supreme. The Shiites maintain that the world and its human community has never and will never be without an ultimate religious authority whose commission is to guide mankind in the name of the God who creates and sustains. In the current historical era, this person is the imam and he is of necessity a direct lineal descendant of Muḥammad through his single, chosen heir and executor, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

A fairly restrictive theory of the imamate and of religious authority was widely accepted by the main Shiite groups. From a tradition common among them from the time of the imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as far back as the first half of the second/eighth century, the concept of the role of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as heir and successor of the prophet, saw in 'Alī much more than the most eminent of Muḥammad's colleagues and hence the most deserving of the imamate or leadership of the community. Shiah doctrine also holds that Muḥammad had actually designated (*naṣṣ*) 'Alī as his successor and thereby had indicated not just his, but God's, will in this matter. Such a designation carried with it a testamentary function (*waṣīya*) in which 'Alī actually inherited from Muḥammad certain of his prophetic powers. Thereafter, 'Alī became the founder (*asās*) of a special form of teaching which was based on his inherited knowledge of the spiritual meaning of the holy law (*sharī'a*). 'Alī in turn bequeathed this divinely sanctioned knowledge to his sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and to the imams who descended from them. By virtue of ordination and inheritance, these imams are both infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) and "firmly versed in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*). They alone truly understand the real meaning of everything which is outwardly unclear or ambiguous in the Qur'ān and the holy law, and they cannot and do not make mistakes in performing this function of interpretation. Their word is authoritative, and they are the only valid guides in each generation of Muslims; not to acknowledge and follow them, therefore, leads to ignorance and, consequently, perdition.

The Shiite doctrine of authority, however, carries with it the following important ramification: in contrast to Sunni Islam, which tends towards schools of interpretation of law and teaching, the Shiah in theory can appeal all questions and disputes to one impeccable source and receive, thereby, answers that have unimpeachable authority and yet which respond to changing exigencies in a timely way. The imam (or before him the prophet) is a wellspring of living wisdom, a source that flows throughout the course of human history with eternal truths and divine science. But, as this highest point of authority resides in only one place, not many – that is, in the person who holds the imamate – in reality the transmission of this authority flows by virtue of intermediate offices which convey what is pure and absolute at the top down through varying degrees of declining authenticity to the ordinary mortals waiting for it at the bottom. For this reason alone, Shiism requires an ecclesiastical establishment built as a hierarchy of religious and doctrinal authority.

But, if this is true of Shiism as a whole and is an all-inclusive principle, what role remains for the individual theologian–philosophers and writers, who were themselves not imams, yet who attempted to discharge at least an expository, but

possibly even a creative, function in the development and propagation of this religious system? The record of Shiite political and intellectual activity includes much more than an account of its supreme pontiff. In reality many scholars and writers contributed to Shiism through their own personal efforts to propound and elucidate both its theory and its practice. Its doctrinal literature grew substantially even in the early periods. Thus the situation – and possibly the dilemma – of the major Shiite writers and clerics to be studied here finds them acting as the agents and propagators of the specific ideologies behind political movements that, according to the theory of Shiism, contained a teaching which ought rightly to be that of the imam alone. In looking at the work of individual writers, Shiite theory forces an investigator to ask to what degree were the thoughts and ideas in Shiite writings really those of its authors. Were their words always merely restatements of the teachings of the imam and his officially authorized representatives? How did each writer see his own contribution in terms of the hierarchical authority within the doctrinal system to which he belonged? An answer is critical to understanding the position of each of the individual scholars and what his teachings mean or were intended to accomplish. In all cases the guiding hand of the imam ought to be evident and should be a critical factor in analyzing any example of Shiite thought. But was this true?

Even if, at one level, all teachings are those of the imam, this ideal model of knowledge and authority is less likely to apply in the treatises which display concepts predominantly philosophical in nature. In these cases individual scholarly initiative surely becomes important. Shiite writers were no more confined within a rigid intellectual system than most of their Sunni adversaries.

An additional difficulty related to authority stems from various differing conceptions of the imamate, especially those concerned with the problem of occultation (*ghayba*). When an imam is in occultation, as is, for example, the case for the Imamis following the greater *ghayba*, he no longer speaks directly to his adherents. In his absence, a form of substitute authority must assume his place. This was also true of some of the earliest Ismailis, who understood their own position in an analogous manner. Their current imam, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, was no longer present; his guidance had passed into the hands of his followers. The theme of imamate and of *ghayba* are, therefore, essential factors in analyzing Shiite writings, even while they are truly illusive issues in the Shiism of the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth century, including that of the Ismailis. To a great extent it raises questions that remain imprecisely answered in the material of this study. Nonetheless, its importance is always discernable just below the surface of the many themes and doctrines to be discussed. It represents but one part of the ideological paradox of Shiism – one which serves to enhance the obscurity of its message.

Thus despite a theoretical paradox, Shiism grants or even requires the existence of a hierarchically ordered, scholarly class whose function is to spread and expound its teachings and doctrine. In fact the Shiah more often than not already depended on an ecclesiastical establishment even when an imam was openly

manifest. During a period of the imam's *ghayba*, such a role not only persists but becomes paramount, since the theory of unceasing divine involvement in human affairs requires the structure of authority all the more so in the absence of the imam.

Long before the end of the third/ninth century, most Shiite groups already adhered to one of several organized missions, each acting on behalf of a specific imam or other claimant to authority, whether present to his followers or absent. Following the death of the eleventh imam of those Shiah who were to become the Twelvers (*Ithnā 'ashariya*) – an event that took place in 260/874 – or, more exactly, after the final disappearance and occultation of the twelfth imam in 329/940, many of their scholars admitted that direct contact with an imam was no longer possible. Nevertheless, a hierarchical organization – a kind of ecclesiastical structure – persisted and was amplified. Perhaps, the most remarkable among all these organizations was the Ismaili *da'wa* which promoted in its various manifestations a claim both that it represented the living imam and that it also acted as his substitute in his absence. Thus an organized mission of scholars and teachers was or became a necessary feature of this form of Shiism as well.

## Ismailism

Evidence suggests that in theory and in practice the Ismaili *da'wa* was carefully organized in a chain of ascending offices, each more encompassing and more powerful than the one below it. Theoretically, at the summit there was always an imam, who was himself, in turn, part of a sacred hierarchy of temporal delegates of God running from ages past and active in the present. However, like their counterparts among the *Imāmiya*, the early *da'wa* more generally recognized an imam in *ghayba*, thereby increasing the importance of the ecclesiastical organization and its individual members. That details now recorded in surviving books and chronicles by the early writers fail to provide a consistent account of either the theory or the practice connected to this doctrine is not as important as the very notion itself. The Ismaili *da'wa* was, self-consciously, the instrument through which true religion – valid law and doctrine, proper belief and action, correct science and knowledge of the universe, rightful loyalty to God and His agent for human affairs, appropriate appreciation of the difference between appearance and reality, between the purely physical and the truly spiritual – was made known to mankind in general and to the believers in particular.

Therefore, an obvious key to explaining the movement behind the various political successes of the early Ismaili Shiah lies in this group's particular concept of *da'wa*, which in this context means more than an appeal or summons to a particular Islamic creed or belief. The *da'wa*, for the Ismailis, was the very organization that functioned as the vehicle of the movement itself. It was its "mission" in each and every sense of the word, and it was its message as well. Resembling a corporate embodiment of that message, much like "the Church" in Christianity, the agents of this *da'wa*, generally, called *dā'īs* (hence

“missionaries”), were the principal actors in the spread of its message. The *dā’īs* carried Ismaili teachings into the territories where they did not already exist, and served to maintain Ismailism after it was once established. So much is clear from the evidence of both Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources, and an extensive list of names of the *dā’īs* survives. Given that their activities were taken by the ruling authorities to be heretical and revolutionary, the personnel of the Ismaili movement – its religious scholars, propagandists, and other agents – is reasonably well known.<sup>1</sup>

Many questions remain to be answered, however, about the exact nature of the *dā’īs’* doctrinal program and the kind of specific appeal they used in various communities of the Islamic world. These writers and preachers, soldiers and scholars, were quite obviously partisans of a specific cause. That is implied, in part, in the very notion of *da’wa* and *dā’ī*. A member of the Ismaili *da’wa* followed, in theory, a carefully defined and restricted doctrinal agenda in how he searched for converts and in what he told the potential member about that form of Shiism to which he subscribed. Some of those activities remained part of an oral teaching which is now almost impossible to reconstruct with any precision. More accessible to modern scholarship, and thus more trustworthy, are other materials that, for one reason or another, were written down and preserved. This literature, consisting of many, only recently available, books and treatises, will eventually provide a true understanding of what the early Ismailis did and did not say about themselves.

Of the many kinds of Shiism at the end of the third/ninth century, Ismailism remains the least known, even though it must be considered highly important since its agents and scholars exercised widespread political, social and intellectual influence at the time. Ismaili Shiism was the sectarian tendency that undergirded both the Fatimid caliphate and the Qarmatian revolts, yet until quite recently assessments of its ideological program were built upon the polemical counter-attacks of Sunnis and other opponents. Works written by members of the *da’wa* that might explain actual Ismaili ideas and doctrines during this critical but obscure period were unavailable or ignored. This was partly due to the inaccessibility of many of the basic sources for Ismaili thinking which were preserved almost exclusively in restricted and protected sectarian libraries.

Slowly those few Ismaili communities that have preserved genuine libraries of their own literature are yielding their contents to public scrutiny. This newly emerging material owes its preservation primarily to a continuous chain of Ismaili scholars and religious authorities reaching back from the present all the way to the beginnings of the Fatimid movement in the last quarter of the third/ninth century. True believers have zealously copied and studied their own special tradition – both the writings of important early disciples of the cause and the works of those who came later. Since the great figures of the distant past retain a vital place in this tradition, many books and treatises by them were preserved and have recently become available to the general scholarly public. For this reason it is now possible to study the development of this form of Shiism during the critical first

century and a half of its existence as a separate sect.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, one can now look at the contributions of individual scholars to this process, thereby learning how Shiite, and particularly Ismaili, doctrinal positions were formed.

This information affords, first and foremost, a new understanding of the religious message and appeal of Ismaili Shiism when it first began, although, even with a growing body of works and treatises by the *dā'īs*, much of their effort to elucidate and spread this form of Shiism continues to be shrouded by persisting difficulties in the analysis of their activities and aims. The details of Ismaili history and its *da'wa* reveal it to be as complex and varied as other ideological movements, despite its claim to a supreme, unimpeachable authority. Its numerous agents did not fit a single mold. Among the scores of names preserved for such Ismaili officials in the first hundred and fifty years of the sect's existence as an independent movement (from the signs of the first Qarmatian revolts about 261/874 until the disappearance of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim in 411/1021), there are persons whose careers indicate a range of special roles within the *da'wa*. Some endeavoured to convert semiliterate, non-Arabic speaking tribesmen, others to dispute with scholars of the highest intellectual attainments. In response to individual situations, the methods of individual *dā'īs* changed. Probably, the doctrines they taught under differing circumstances likewise had various levels appropriate to different audiences. This seems quite natural.

Like most underground, minority religious movements with a definite doctrinal program, however, the Ismailis and their *da'wa* were constantly subject to splintering, and this is certainly reflected in the records which now exist concerning them. An important problem, then, is to determine when and how these differences became mutually incompatible, leading to the formation of sects within Ismailism itself, because this is what actually happened. And when it did, what positions did the various members take, and over what issues? The life and thought of ranking officials of the *da'wa* and their various loyalties, whether intellectual or political, were as varied as the movement itself. The sectarian attitudes of the individual *dā'īs*, although suggested by the sources, may never be known with certainty. Many details of their activities remain hidden from outside scrutiny. Fear of exposure and misunderstanding obviously imposed secrecy on the *dā'īs*. Condemnation by non-Ismaili authorities was frequent enough. Where the *da'wa* could not function openly because it espoused a set of doctrines vehemently opposed by the ruling majority, this danger of exposure and condemnation persisted and may have influenced the form and content of Ismaili writings. Therefore questions of loyalty, obedience and adherence to higher authority only complicate a situation of secrecy and caution imposed by being a minority.

Ismailism could not help being revolutionary. In declaring that the reigning Abbasid caliphate had come to power by usurpation<sup>3</sup> and that, therefore, the current government violated God's explicit commandment, the Ismaili *da'wa* automatically willed the overturning of the Muslim establishment and thus courted trouble by virtue of its very existence. There were other elements of their



teaching that put them in constant jeopardy, and many of the *dā'īs* suffered harshly at the hands of their enemies. If they pursued their activities outside of the political dominion of Ismaili co-religionists, their chances for martyrdom were good. Of those writers who contributed most to the development of an Ismaili literature in this early period, only those actually living in Fatimid territory were safe. Of the major figures who clearly stand out, only two had careers almost exclusively within Fatimid territory.<sup>4</sup> Many, if not most, of the *dā'īs* outside were eventually executed either by the authorities or by angry mobs incited to violence by those who preached against them.

Remarkably, the Ismaili cause both survived and flourished at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, not just in North Africa, the Yemen, Bahrain and parts of Iraq, Arabia, and Syria which were actually under the control of an Ismaili state, but in such territories of their enemies as Iraq, Khurasan and the district of Rayy. The organization that held the movement together had succeeded and, if it is true that it was unified and centrally directed throughout, it formed a large, sophisticated, multi-national enterprise covering the whole of the Islamic world from Spain to India. Almost exclusively, however, the outstanding exponents of Ismaili thought, particularly in its more philosophical kind, bear names that relate them to various provinces of Iran. Of the great figures in Ismaili philosophy who were al-Sijistānī's main predecessors, al-Rāzī was from Rayy in the northwest and al-Nasafī from Nasaf in the northeast. Al-Sijistānī's own *nisba* connects him to Sijistan in the east.<sup>5</sup> Al-Kirmānī, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, and Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, all of whom were important later writers, also came from Iran. Al-Rāzī, al-Nasafī, and al-Sijistānī were, moreover, active almost exclusively within the *da'was* of these regions. Therefore in trying to understand the work of these figures, especially in their role as Ismaili scholars and apologists, it is essential to investigate the history of early Ismaili activity in Iran rather than elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

One immediate question is how the various Iranian missions related to Fatimid or Qarmatian policies and the differing versions of the Ismaili message during that crucial period. In studying the writings of the *dā'īs*, even subtle discrepancies assume importance if they are attributable, as they often appear to be, to internal disagreements about the content of Ismailism and its teaching. Therefore it is worth dwelling at some length on the primary point at which the most serious of these divergences arose, namely the question of who was imam and who was the expected messiah and what were the implications implicit in the responses given by the various proponents of one answer or another.

The Ismailis, in opposition to other forms of Shiism, supported their own specific line of imams after the death of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). Surely, if any single concept brought all of the Ismailis together, it was their fundamental attachment to the line of imams they accepted. Yet, when Wilferd Madelung, the first modern investigator with access to a substantial range of the early Ismaili literature, attempted to verify the doctrine of the imamate and the messiah in each of the successive phases of the history of the movement, he found that the literature produced by the *da'wa* offered no consistent teaching on these issues. In

fact, the doctrine appeared to change over time, evolving according to circumstances. He discovered, moreover, that at any given time there were important variations between the views of one faction and another.<sup>7</sup>

Based primarily on the literature of Ismailism and the specific teachings of important members of the *da'wa*, plus some information from outside sources, the following picture emerges of what the early *dā'īs* actually claimed. Initially – that is, in the period between the earliest known manifestations of the Ismaili movement about 260/874<sup>8</sup> and the announcement in 286 of his intention to end the era of concealment by the head of the sect who was to become caliph under the name 'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī – the general appeal of the *da'wa* was for allegiance to the imam Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, son of the son of Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765). This imam, being the seventh such imam after 'Alī's son Ḥasan, was of extraordinary cosmic significance because he was the seventh imam of the sixth prophetic era (that of Muḥammad and Islam). Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, then in occultation, but about to appear as the Messiah, would bring to an end the physical constraints of man's worldly condition and usher in spiritual paradise. The expectation of his reappearance was urgent and immediate, demanding that this imam/messiah be recognized and acknowledged without delay.

The return of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, although naturally vague in its exact implications, meant a variety of things, some of which were mutually exclusive. For example, his advent for some would signal (or had signaled) the end of the rule of Islam. This view was based on common Shiite doctrine that the prophet Muḥammad, although seal of the kind of prophecy which he represented and which supplanted the divine laws of those who preceded him,<sup>9</sup> had provided mankind with a scriptural law built of necessity on a double base: its outward, plain meaning in worldly terms and its inner, hidden, otherworldly significance. The distinction between these two aspects of the law or scripture – that is, its exoteric and its esoteric meaning – was a feature of the current condition of man in the physical world. But shortly, upon his advent, the Messiah would change this by cancelling the need for the purely physical forms of the law (and its injunctions which apply to bodily rites and rituals) by revealing permanently the true reality of a paradise in which no restricting ordinances are necessary. Thus if the exoteric aspect of sacred law in the latest historical period is Islam, the coming of the Messiah cancels Islamic legal injunctions. The critical problem for most Ismailis in this early period was to determine whether or not Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the Messiah, whose existence was accepted by them, had properly “returned” or not. Was his advent an accomplished or rather a future fact?

A sober Ismaili concept of the Messiah's coming (or return), known as the Resurrection (*al-Qiyāma*), implies no more than that generally accepted by most other Muslims: the end of human history and the final hour, just prior to the gathering of souls for the judging of deeds with the divine purpose of punishment and recompense. That event is due at some unspecified moment in the future. The opposing interpretation by certain Ismaili groups insisted that one or more intermediate steps might occur between the more extreme version, which says that the

Messiah has come and that Islamic law is null and void, and this generally accepted notion. According to this middle position, only the outward, literal restrictions of Muhammadan law are lifted by the termination of the distinction between the literal form of revelation, the *Qur'ān*, and its interpretation (*ta'wīl*). One possibility is that the interpretation, as the province of the living imam, becomes dominant or even exclusive. The literal form of the revelation no longer has any validity not accorded explicitly by the latter; the imam of the present naturally rises in importance over the prophet of the past.

The history of the Ismailis contains many incidences of these various understandings of the advent of the Messiah or of the resurrection, as well as subtle variations for each position. The whole issue of the relationship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the expected Messiah, to the imams who professed to continue his line – these being the Fatimid imams and caliphs – also complicates the matter to the point that a simple, coherent picture of a standard Ismaili doctrine is unobtainable. Basically, however, the notion the *da'wa* proclaimed at first was the messiahship of an imam born not later than the second/eighth century who would *return* from concealment. For many Ismailis this changed in 286/899–90, when the future al-Mahdī announced his intention to assume publicly the role of imam and caliph in his own right and to pass this position on to his son and descendants. Previous to this he and his predecessors had been known by the title *Hujja*, which in Ismaili terminology usually means the chief of the *da'wa*, and not the imam.<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation of the older doctrine of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the final imam of the Islamic era and this possibility of a continuing line of imams among his descendants was not readily achieved.<sup>11</sup> It is a principal theme in early Ismaili literature, and significant vestiges of disagreements and antagonism about this difficulty appear long after most of those who refused to accept the validity of al-Mahdī's new policy or the dissident movements they instigated had ceased to exist.

In one sense this is the way Qarmatian Ismailism must be defined and separated from Fatimid Ismailism.<sup>12</sup> The Qarmatians never accepted the new teaching, preferring to await the return of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. Many others, too, who had promoted the older teaching about Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl could not reach a clear doctrinal accommodation with their Fatimid co-religionists, including a substantial portion of the major *dā'īs* from the eastern provinces, among them important writers of doctrinal literature.

There was a compromise position, however. In the reign of the fourth Fatimid imam and caliph al-Mu'izz (341/953–365/975), a major shift took place and the following teaching became standard doctrine on this issue. It was now conceded that the *da'wa*, which had been acting in the name of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, was not mistaken in holding him to be the Messiah whose advent will indicate the end of the exoteric/esoteric distinction. But due to the special and unique nature of the era of the prophet Muḥammad, a perpetuation of the worldly rule of a line of divinely appointed leaders had become necessary. These leaders are termed caliphs (*khulafā'*) or lieutenants.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of this new attitude on the part of the Fatimids, many of the older *dā'īs* – those currently active and some from the periods even earlier – were reintegrated or incorporated in a renewed and revived *da'wa*, with a new sense of orthodoxy and a loyalty to a unified leadership, which was then in the process of re-asserting itself under an unusually able caliph, himself about to move to create in Egypt a new capital of both his physical domain and his ecclesiastical mission. Serious reasons exist to doubt whether a significant number of the *dā'īs* recognized the Fatimid imams as imams in the absolute sense, noted earlier, prior to this time. Their *da'wa*, that is their call or appeal, continued to be for an imam who remained in occultation long after the Fatimids had begun to rule. Subsequently, many eventually did accept the Shiite rulers of north Africa and Egypt as imams and heads of the movement to which they belonged.

In time these fine distinctions receded from the present concerns of younger generations of *dā'īs*. By the era of al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh, certainly by the close of his reign in 411/1021, the exact implications of the belief in Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl were rapidly being forgotten in the Ismaili establishment, to be replaced by the more conventional and straightforward concept of an uninterrupted lineal descent, proceeding imam after imam to the end of human history. The great writers and heroes of the earlier periods were only partially remembered and that selectively. What clearly would not accord with later understanding of both the *da'wa* and its teaching about the imam was either abandoned or edited out of surviving versions of the older literature. Some names dropped from the pantheon of the illustrious altogether; but surprisingly many retained their high status and were honored both in deed and more particularly in word by continued study emulation in the *majālis* or sessions of the scholars. The later Fatimid Ismailis recalled the history of the early *da'wa* in Iran and Iraq vaguely since the events from that period were full of troublesome disagreements and conflict, especially as seen from the later vantage of the Fatimid *da'wa* and its relatively secure and entrenched establishment in Cairo. By the end of the fourth/tenth century many issues which perplexed the earlier generations were no longer of central concern. New teachings replaced old problems. Selected writings of the great figures did endure, although many others were neglected or abandoned. The details of their personal activities, however, were largely forgotten.<sup>14</sup>

What survives now of the contributions by individual scholars to these doctrinal disputes in the early Ismaili *da'wa* forms only a limited amount of its most important literature, but that is a vital and highly significant legacy. Of the many books, treatises and tracts known to have been composed by those authorities, only a precious few are extant. The process whereby some survived and others did not may never be adequately explained; however, those that do now exist must have claimed a special prominence in order for them to have been copied again and again over the nine hundred years that intervene. Not all of the surviving material, however, is of equal value, either for references to the history of the Ismaili *da'wa* and its teachings, or as examples of Shiite thought in that critical period. The group that created this early literature featured four of the

Iranian *dā'īs*, Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), Abū Ya'q'ub al-Sijistānī,<sup>15</sup> and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1021),<sup>16</sup> and two Fatimid officials, al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) and Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (active in the mid fourth/tenth century).

Of these only the Iranians were philosophers in any sense and of them al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī occupy a special place. They were not merely writers of some of the best and most valued doctrinal treatises, but they were philosophical thinkers with a genuine claim to the attention of historians of Islamic philosophy. This judgment is probably valid also for al-Nasafī but his writings have not survived, and this makes firm conclusions about his philosophical contribution difficult, although the little evidence does suggest a similar conclusion. Abū Ḥātim likewise, though less inclined to philosophy than the other three, did offer a few interesting contributions in this field. As important as it is to understand the details of early Ismaili thought as a whole, the added dimension which the philosophical interests of these four early *dā'īs*, particularly al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, gave to their works raises their importance well beyond the purely sectarian considerations with which each began. And it makes the study of them much more than an investigation of the *da'wa* to which they belonged.

In addition to the writings of these outstanding figures, there must have been a considerable number of works written by various other members of the *da'wa*, even in the period prior to the founding of the Fatimid state.<sup>17</sup> Such outside sources as Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* recorded the names of some of these authors. Clearly a number wrote on philosophical themes or at least treated their Ismaili Shiism philosophically. That can be proven from a few isolated citations now available. The exact nature of their individual contributions, however, is not known since so little survives. Why it did not is a minor puzzle. In addition to the possibility of a major disagreement over the issue of the imamate, there is a substantial likelihood that the writers who came after them – such as al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī – wrote works of greater appeal (and perhaps greater orthodoxy) and therefore the literature of the earliest groups of *dā'īs* tended to be neglected. One highly important instance of this trend, to be discussed later, appears in the case of al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*, an early, perhaps the earliest, book by an Ismaili writer to show clear philosophical (Neoplatonic) influences.<sup>18</sup>

### The *da'wa* in Iran

The *da'wa* in Northwest Persia, Khurasan, Sijistan, Transoxania, and to a lesser extent Iraq, produced a greater proportion of those *dā'īs* whose primary aim was the conversion of an educated, scholarly elite. At least such an assessment is justifiable on the basis of the surviving reports of their activities and the written materials on doctrinal matters that they contributed to the literature of Ismailism.<sup>19</sup> The social and intellectual environment in these areas may have demanded a more elaborate form of doctrinal discourse and thus stimulated a heightened interest in philosophical learning. Alternately the record of the *da'wa* in these provinces may

be reflected in its literature and scholarly activities simply because the *dā'īs* in those regions never achieved a lasting political success and therefore little is known about the efforts of its non-literary members.

Regardless of why there were more Ismaili philosophers in Iran than elsewhere, it is true that the earliest evidence of philosophy in Ismaili thought comes from the *da'wa* of either Khurasan or the district of Rayy. In analyzing the contributions of a later writer such as al-Sijistānī, who came from the same milieu, it is essential to examine carefully those who came before him. These writers generally did not claim an independent intellectual position, because they adhered, theoretically at least, to a common cause which promoted a standard teaching – one which radiated solely from the family of the prophet and the properly ordained descendants of 'Alī. The untangling of the actuality behind this theory requires an investigation of the history and internal relationships of the Ismaili missions in Iran that produced these earlier philosophers.

S. M. Stern's reconstruction of the sequence of *dā'īs* in Iran, which he derived from the various anti-Ismaili sources, suggests that the earliest formal "mission" began at Rayy under a certain *dā'ī* named Khalaf in the period prior to the crisis of 286, possibly even as early as 260.<sup>20</sup> Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī was the major figure in this *da'wa* prior to his death in 322/934–5, although he may never have been overtly loyal to the Fatimids as imams since he seemed to have corresponded with the Qarmatian faction in Bahrayn.<sup>21</sup> He became a prominent writer on various aspects of Shiite lore, as well as a minor proponent of early philosophical Shiism.<sup>22</sup> Three of his works survive, having been subsequently accepted by the Fatimid *da'wa* by the time of al-Kirmānī, possibly with appropriate editorial deletions. His *Kitāb al-zīna* is a veritable lexicon of religious terminology but it has no particular Ismaili leaning.<sup>23</sup> One of the other two works records Abū Ḥātim's debate over the signs and proofs of prophecy with the famous philosopher (and physician) Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyā' al-Rāzī.<sup>24</sup> Abū Bakr and Abū Ḥātim were fellow townsmen and the *A'lam al-nubūwa* indicates that their debates often took place in a public forum, presumably in Rayy. Again as with the *Kitāb al-zīna*, the *A'lam al-nubūwa* has no specifically Ismaili content or tone. The third treatise, *al-Iṣlāḥ* (The Rectification), has greater significance for the history of the *da'wa*. It contains a lengthy refutation of the work of fellow *dā'ī* Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*, which already had acquired a reputation in a number of circles as the standard expression of Ismaili thought and doctrine.<sup>25</sup> The *Iṣlāḥ* also contains important material about Abū Ḥātim's Ismaili leanings and, most importantly, his philosophical tendencies.

For Khurasan, Stern lists a number of early figures but the key person there was most probably the Amir al-Marwazī, a fairly prominent and powerful supporter of the Ismaili cause. His involvement with them began long before he actually became head of the *da'wa* in the region. Al-Marwazī's protection may have done much to promote and expand the work of the *dā'īs*, particularly their scholarship. Among the retinue of al-Marwazī was the well-known philosopher Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934), whose credentials include having studied in Baghdad with

the famous third/ninth-century philosopher, Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī. This al-Balkhī, whose father was from Sijistan, maintained good relations with his own townsman Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (al-Ka'bī), who had become the head of the Mu'tazila in Baghdad. The Amir al-Marwazī evidently granted Abū Zayd a stipend which continued until he published a book on *ta'wīl* (interpretation) at which point such sponsorship came to an end. Presumably Abū Zayd, who had apparently departed from his Shiite background in the direction of Sunni orthodoxy, did not subscribe to that notion of *ta'wīl* which is so essential to Ismaili theory.<sup>26</sup> His career in Khurasan, however, demonstrates how the elite scholarly classes of places like Nishapur, not to mention Balkh and Sijistan, were conducting their intellectual activities at a sophisticated level, with continuous interaction through correspondence and travel between major academic centers such as then existed in Baghdad and Rayy.

Another member of the select circle of the Amir was Muḥammad al-Nasafī, the most important philosopher among the early Ismailis, who in fact succeeded al-Marwazī as head of the *da'wa* in Khurasan. An enemy of the Ismailis from much later times, the famous wazīr Nizām al-Mulk credited al-Nasafī with having been "... one of the philosophers of Khurasan and a theologian."<sup>27</sup> Al-Nasafī himself had joined the *da'wa* in Khurasan before or during the ascendancy of the Amir al-Marwazī, whose disciple or protégé he must have been.<sup>28</sup> It was he in addition who wrote the *Maḥṣūl* – the first major work in which philosophical training was put to service in the Ismaili cause and subsequently exposed to fairly wide scrutiny. More than any other single book, the *Maḥṣūl* achieved recognition as the quintessential expression of the doctrines of the movement (apart from those purely connected to arguments about the imamate). Extensively cited by name in a way no other work of the Ismailis ever was, perhaps because it was written during the open period of the *da'wa* in Khurasan in the days of al-Marwazī's ascendancy, it both earned al-Nasafī the reputation accredited to him by Nizām al-Mulk and others and indicates that the work itself circulated outside of *da'wa* control.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Nasafī's misfortune with his *Maḥṣūl* was not entirely due to a series of critical reviews and refutations written by opponents among his Sunni and Zaydi adversaries but as well to substantial works of "rectification" issued by other Ismaili *dā'īs*. Ultimately the book itself disappeared, probably in part because it fell into obsolescence, quite possibly as a result of the popularity of the writings of al-Sijistānī which, while reputed to be similar in content and inclinations, were also apparently better argued and more firmly grounded in philosophical reasoning.<sup>30</sup>

Briefly, al-Nasafī enjoyed the lingering prestige of the deceased Amir when he became head of the *da'wa* himself. His own attempts in Khurasan at the conversion of powerful courtiers brought him an opportunity finally to persuade the Samanid ruler Naṣr b. Aḥmad to accept the Ismaili call. The list of ranking dignitaries who responded to al-Nasafī is impressive. Abū Bakr Nakhshabī, the boon companion, Abū Ash'ath, the private secretary, Abū Maṣṣūr Chaghānī,

inspector of the army. Aytāsh, chamberlain, Ḥasan, governor of Īlāq, and 'Alī Zarrād, the private deputy. That Nizām al-Mulk – the source for this information – could cite so many names confirms both the power but more particularly the openness of al-Nasafī's activity.<sup>31</sup>

Not long after he converted the ruler, other factions within the Samanid establishment brought about a reversal of Ismaili influence. Naṣr died, his son Nūḥ took over, and commenced a complete massacre of al-Nasafī and his followers. This ugly process began with a public confrontation between al-Nasafī and Sunni theologians.<sup>32</sup> Massive slaughter in Khurasan in 332/943, like earlier reversals in Rayy and other places,<sup>33</sup> put an end to the open attempts of these *da'was* to raise a substantial public following. A new era of precautionary secrecy commenced at the disastrous failures of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Muḥammad al-Nasafī in Northwest Persia and Khurasan respectively. As a consequence a curtain fell over the historical record in both places at exactly this juncture and the next major figure in the *da'wa*, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, remained all but unknown and unrecorded in the chronicles of that period.

### Al-Sijistānī's biography

Like many Islamic scholars from a century long past, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī appears most completely only through his surviving books and treatises. Paradoxically, whereas they continue to exist, the information about who he was, where he lived, or the other details of his biography are scarce, woefully incomplete and therefore full of uncertainties. There is no date for his birth nor for his death except as obtained by approximation and guesses. Worse still, even his identity in the historical record remains a puzzle containing various problems and doubts. It is possibly inappropriate to try to outline the biography of a person like al-Sijistānī whose writings are the only clear and relatively unambiguous evidence about him. Still, they do testify without question to someone of major importance, both in the history of the Ismaili *da'wa* and in the history of Islamic philosophy, even though perhaps typically the information which serves to place him within some sort of chronology is weak and fragmentary. Characteristically, little of it derives from surviving records of the *da'wa*.

Nevertheless, trustworthy data, above all a few facts given by al-Sijistānī himself, have surfaced. Statements about him by later Ismaili writers, mainly Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw are also useful. Finally, there is a hodgepodge of incomplete, often cryptic, reports concerning a person or persons cited variously as Ya'qūb, Abū Ya'qūb, Ishāq,<sup>34</sup> al-Sijistānī, al-Sijzī, Bandanah (*panba-dāna*), and Khayshafūj or a combination of these names. Whether all these references apply to the same person and whether he is the writer of the works which survive in the name of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī is a matter of some doubt.

Ignoring for the moment the facts indicating al-Sijistānī's biography in his own writings (little enough at any event), the remaining non-Ismaili sources provide only a few clues. One offers an account which asserts that, following the death of



Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, the leadership of his *da'wa* passed to someone named Ishāq, then living in Rayy.<sup>35</sup> Another version – one given by Kāshānī – mentions an Abū Muḥammad al-Mu'allim, who succeeded Abū Ḥātim and his son Abū Ya'qūb, who appeared in Gurgan but fled to Bukhara.<sup>36</sup> Yet another report mentions a certain Abū Ya'qūb as a major figure in Rayy about 320,<sup>37</sup> and a further reference cites the name of a *dā'ī* in Baghdad who was once a lieutenant of Abū Ya'qūb.<sup>38</sup>

Do all these references point to a single figure although none cite this person by means of a *nisba*? Is it, nevertheless, al-Sijistānī? Significantly, al-Sijistānī himself reports that he was in Baghdad, returning from a pilgrimage, in the year 322/934.<sup>39</sup> One of the precious few facts available from his own unchallengeable testimony, it fits nicely with the evidence already noted. It indicates that he was adult and active by this year and could very well have assumed a major role in the *da'wa*, even prior to acquiring the *nisba* which relates him to the province of Sijistan, although it is also possible that he was originally from there as well.

But what about Khurasan and Sijistan? Does al-Sijistānī – the same person as the Abū Ya'qūb mentioned above – move from western Persia and Mesopotamia to Khurasan (fleeing?) and assume the leadership there after al-Nasafī's tragic end?<sup>40</sup> The Zaydi al-Bustī mentions him at least twice as “*ṣāhib Sijistān*” (Master of Sijistan)<sup>41</sup> implying that he was, in the last phase of his career, closely identified with that province. Al-Baghdādī in his account of the Ismaili heresy mentions an “Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijzī known as *Bandāna*” along with al-Nasafī.<sup>42</sup> In al-Isfarā'īnī, the same passage reads, “and his *da'wa* in the country of Sijistan was led by Abū Ya'qūb.”<sup>43</sup> “His *da'wa*” presumably means al-Nasafī's.

The nickname *Bandāna* (*panba-dāna*) is otherwise unattested, although another version of the name is present in the accounts of Rashīd al-Dīn,<sup>44</sup> Kāshānī,<sup>45</sup> and al-Bustī. In all cases the word can be read *Khayshafūj*, although the copyists of the various manuscripts were certainly confused about this.<sup>46</sup> The surviving text of al-Bustī's refutation of the *Bāṭinīya* cites the person in question six times, variously as al-Khayshafūj al-Sijzī, or al-Khayshafūj, or al-Sijzī alone and twice connects this name with known works of the author al-Sijistānī.<sup>47</sup> *Khayshafūj* must be an Arabic rendering of Persian *Panba-dāna*; both mean “cottonseed.”<sup>48</sup> Al-Baghdādī therefore knew it in its common Persian form. This odd bit of information becomes even stranger by its appearance in these two forms, even if they mean the same thing. Al-Sijistānī (or Sijzī), nicknamed “cottonseed,” is active in the *da'wa* of Sijistan and quite possibly Khurasan, but none of the authorities provides direct and unambiguous evidence of a link between him and the earlier major figure named only Abū Ya'qūb. Yet it is easier and simpler to assume a common identity for both – the transfer from one territory to another may or may not be reflected in the names.

Finally, Rashīd al-Dīn gives the one and only report of al-Sijistānī's death: “After this time Ishāq Sijzī, nicknamed Khayshafūj, was *dā'ī* in Sistan; he was killed by the Amir Khalaf b. Aḥmad Sijzī.” This Amir governed Sijistan (Sistan) from 353/964–5 until 393/1002–3 and thus Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī died a martyr during this forty-year period.<sup>49</sup> Internal evidence from his own writings may make

this more precise. In al-Sijistānī's own work called *al-Ifṭikhār* (*The Boast*), he twice states that three hundred and fifty years (plus) have passed since the death of the prophet Muḥammad in the year 11/632.<sup>50</sup> Therefore he wrote this book about 361/971 or soon after. Moreover, the chronological sequence offered for his works below proves that this work is one of his last. Thus al-Sijistānī's death came nearer to this date than the latter end of Governor Khalaf's long reign. If he was already adult in 322/934, when he participated in the *ḥajj*, he would have reached his sixties at a minimum by the time he was writing the *al-Ifṭikhār*. Furthermore, he himself specifies in this same treatise that the special heptad of *khulafā'* – those allowed for the era of Muḥammad – has not yet reached its end.<sup>51</sup> Thus the period during which al-Sijistānī wrote his last works surely corresponds to the reign of al-Mu'izz which came to an end with this caliph's death in 365/975.<sup>52</sup>

One significant problem this review of the scattered data about his career did not address is al-Sijistānī's rank and position within the *da'wa* itself. Ismaili records do not say what his relationship was to any other known members of that organization, nor does this material discuss his contacts with a specific reigning imam or caliph. In al-Sijistānī's own writings no explicit reference makes the situation any clearer. Philosophically, he owed a good deal to Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and to Muḥammad al-Nasafī, and perhaps others in the earlier *da'wa* but he does not overtly admit this, except in a vague and unspecific way. Al-Sijistānī also betrays little of the usual Shiite concern for the direct, personal authority of a living imam – at least it is not expressed in these writings – and most significantly he does not cite or name an imam after Muḥammad b. Ismā'il.<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, he describes the earthly religious hierarchy as having the following five levels: *Nāṭiq*, *Asās*, *Imām*, *Lāḥiq*, *Janāḥ*. These terms roughly translate respectively as speaking-prophet (the lawgiver), founder (of the Interpretation), imam (the preserver and maintainer of the Interpretation in each generation), his deputy or adjunct (here al-Sijistānī means the twelve regional chiefs of the *da'wa*),<sup>54</sup> and lastly the ordinary missionary-*dā'ī*. While the imam certainly preserves a vital place in the sacred hierarchy of this scheme, what is of importance in this instance is al-Sijistānī's view of the *lāḥiq*, the higher of the two ranks which fall below the imam, since it may suggest his rank in the *da'wa*. His concept of the earthly hierarchy includes what he calls the "two branches" (*al-far'ān*).<sup>55</sup> These are the imam and the *lawāḥiq* (the imam's Adjuncts, the plural of *lāḥiq*), the latter holding a rank just below the imam.

The overall scheme he outlines offers some sense for his use of the term "two branches." There are two "roots" in the spiritual world: the preceder (*al-Sābiq*), which is the intellect in philosophical language, and the follower (*al-Tālī*), which is the soul. In the terrestrial and historical realm, there are also two key figures called by him the "two founders" (*al-Asāsān*), which might also be rendered "two foundations," perhaps here having the meaning "trunks" as in trunks of a tree. They are the speaking-prophet (*al-Nāṭiq*) and his executor (*Waṣī*).<sup>56</sup> Al-Sijistānī continues with the "two branches" as if following the logic of his metaphor of the

tree. Thus there are two roots (beneath the earth and hence hidden from sight), two trunks (as the foundation of the tree on the surface of the earth), and two branches which spread upward from this base.<sup>57</sup> Al-Sijistānī clearly indicates that the *lāḥiq* possesses some portion of prophetic powers, even if these powers are but a fraction of those of any other level above. It is tempting to suggest that these *lāḥiqs* were, in the time of al-Sijistānī, the active doctrinal authorities in each of the regional *da'was* and that each possessed personal access to the *ta'wīl* and most probably also *ta'yīd* (divine support and guidance). Thus it was the *lawāḥiq* who established, promoted and protected Ismaili teachings in that period of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl's *ghayba*.<sup>58</sup> One likely possibility is that al-Sijistānī was himself a *lāḥiq* and this would imply that he held considerable power, not only as the director of a regional *da'wa*, but as an architect of Ismaili doctrines and the methods employed to interpret and defend them. This also explains how he, for one, resolved the dilemma posed earlier concerning doctrinal authority within Shiism.<sup>59</sup>

### Al-Sijistānī's works

As with the life of al-Sijistānī, the nature of his literary production is susceptible to the same three classes of evidence: the testimony of his own writings; comments, criticisms and miscellaneous references by other members of the Ismaili *da'wa*; and one or two citations by outsiders. In terms of content, he speaks for himself, but in doing so inevitably the works listed in his name or ascribed to him must, at the moment, be only those now found in the various modern Ismaili communities, especially that of the Bohras in India. This material depends on a continuous tradition of studying and copying reaching back to the fourth/tenth century and it cannot help but present problems as to authenticity, either in the exact wording of a portion of a text or in the very integrity of the surviving work as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

Although al-Sijistānī continued to be greatly esteemed almost as a founding father of Ismaili doctrine and thought, the full meaning and significance of portions of what he had said was lost fairly early in this process. Ismaili teachings changed significantly after the end of the Fatimid period. In the Yemen in the Ṭayyibi *da'wa*, where occurred the most active attempt at preservation and conservation of the earlier literary material, Ismaili thought shifted toward a less critical, but more eclectic, accommodation of various, often conflicting, views inherited from such great figures as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī, the important fifth/eleventh century *dā'ī* Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī and others. What al-Sijistānī wrote no longer held any primacy and his individual statements were frequently interpreted so as to accord with opposing doctrine taught by al-Kirmānī.<sup>61</sup> Since these tendencies have never been analyzed or studied, their effect on the preservation of the texts can unfortunately not be realized at the moment.<sup>62</sup>

For al-Sijistānī, some of whose books and treatises are extant and some not,

these are complicated problems. In addition, he himself probably modified his views in adjusting to a later doctrine of the imamate and either revised his earlier works or wrote new ones. If he and others once felt a reluctance to recognize the imamate of the Fatimid rulers, as suggested above, he altered this view in the texts that now exist by admitting to an additional set of seven *khulafā'* for the era of Muḥammad. Because he explicitly credits the fourth of these leaders with having conquered cities, this must be a reference to al-Mahdī, the first of the Fatimid caliphs. And this dates the whole of his surviving corpus to a period corresponding approximately to the reign of al-Mu'izz (341/953–365/975). That is when a second set of "imams" would not have been exceeded and yet is also a period when the messiahship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'il was admitted in Fatimid circles. These two conditions both fit the pronouncements on this issue in the surviving treatise of al-Sijistānī and reflect official Fatimid policy at the same time. What this implies is that earlier writings by al-Sijistānī were neglected, abandoned, or simply no longer circulated in the *da'wa*. He himself may have been responsible for this development.

Further corroboration of the theory that al-Sijistānī changed his position on some issues was provided by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who commented that on the subject of the metempsychosis of human souls, al-Sijistānī once held an unorthodox view which the authorities later convinced him to alter.<sup>63</sup> Al-Kirmānī likewise suggested that there are observable revisions in the works of al-Sijistānī between items which, al-Kirmānī speculates, must be early and those of a later period.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, as will be seen, it is only the later treatises which survive into modern times.

Among the surviving works or parts of works by al-Sijistānī, several are well recognized by Ismaili tradition and therefore are of less questionable orthodoxy.<sup>65</sup> These are *Kitāb al-bishāra* (*Glad Tidings*) – if this work really has survived<sup>66</sup> – *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* (*Prophecy's Proof*), *Kitāb al-yanābī'* (*The Wellsprings*), *Kitāb al-maqālīd* (*The Keys*), *Kitāb al-iftikhār* (*The Boast*), and *Sullam al-najāt* (*The Ladder of Salvation*). With a few reservations, to these must be added *al-Nuṣra* (*The Support*) and *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (*Revealing the Concealed*) although neither is known in anything like its original form. What remains of both is either limited to a series of quotations in another work by a different (and largely critical) author (*al-Nuṣra*) or a summary and paraphrase in another language (the Persian text of *Kashf al-maḥjūb*).<sup>67</sup> Most importantly, al-Sijistānī himself attests to the first four by citing them in another of his own works. In addition al-Kirmānī, surely one of the most knowledgeable early witnesses, credits *al-iftikhār*, as well as *al-Maqālīd*, explicitly to al-Sijistānī in several places.<sup>68</sup> In fact al-Kirmānī quotes a fairly lengthy passage from *al-Maqālīd* in one of his own short treatises.<sup>69</sup>

If the internal citations allow an accurate judgment of the sequence in which al-Sijistānī wrote these treatises, then *al-Bishāra*, *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, and *al-Yanābī'* preceded *al-Maqālīd* because it mentions all three (and none of the rest).<sup>70</sup> Following *al-Maqālīd* al-Sijistānī composed *al-iftikhār*, which cites the

former as well as *al-Bishāra*,<sup>71</sup> and his *Sullam al-najāt*, which also mentions *al-Maqālīd*.<sup>72</sup> If this sequence is valid, al-Sijistānī's *al-Iftikhār*, in which the author comments that he is writing some three hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632), comes at the end of those works confirmed by this method. This dates this body of his writing to a period just prior to 361/971, and also implies that it falls within the reign of al-Mu'izz, thus confirming the hypotheses expressed above. Certain works like his *al-Nuṣra*, in which he answered his fellow *dā'ī*'s criticism of al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*, and his *Kashf al-maḥjūb* both of which may have contained a teaching about metempsychosis or arguments leaning toward it which were unacceptable to the imam or the *da'wa*, must be from an earlier period, perhaps from a time before the advent of al-Mu'izz whose rule began in 341/953.<sup>73</sup>

These conclusions are, in part, based on al-Sijistānī's acceptance of al-Mu'izz's revision of the Fatimid position concerning the imamate as noted previously. In the revised doctrine Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl is the Messiah (*al-Qā'im al-mahdī*) in *ghayba* (occultation). The era of Muḥammad requires a second set of seven imams called *khulafā'* prior to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl's return. Al-Sijistānī explicitly recognized such a doctrine in *Sullam al-najāt*, *al-Iftikhār*, *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, *al-Yanābī'* and *al-Maqālīd*,<sup>74</sup> and the correspondence of his declaration on this matter in all five works – namely that the Messiah is Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, who has gone into occultation at present but whose *da'wa* is being spread and propagated by his deputies (*khulafā'*) of which there will be exactly seven (no more)<sup>75</sup> – supports the conclusion that all were published within a relatively short time span. In the process of his conversion to this doctrine, al-Sijistānī reappraised his own earlier writings in the light of new directives from Fatimid headquarters. This may have been the occasion for other revisions and deletions or, in any case, some as yet unclear alterations in his position (such as modifying his stand on metempsychosis). If the surviving corpus of al-Sijistānī's works date from the reign of al-Mu'izz, that need not mean that they were all originally composed then but that the final version of them was issued at that time. It does require, however, that they are not later than 365/975.

The appearance of al-Sijistānī's *Nuṣra* in al-Kirmānī's *Kitāb al-riyāḍ* suggests that it continued to be studied in the *da'wa*. In that book al-Kirmānī, who obviously possessed a copy of the *Nuṣra*, speculated that because some of al-Sijistānī's views seem to have changed over time, portions of the older texts may have been inadvertently or even deliberately altered by copyists.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless copies of the earlier treatises were still circulating and al-Kirmānī, as is evident from his critical review of them, must have possessed versions of al-Nasafī's *Maḥṣūl* as well as the *Nuṣra*. Equally Nāṣir-i Khusraw must have had access to the original Arabic text of *Kashf al-maḥjūb* and other older writings.<sup>77</sup> But there are other interesting questions concerning Nāṣir-i Khusraw's access to the works of al-Sijistānī. Clearly he had read a good deal of al-Sijistānī, as is evident particularly in his *Khwān al-ikhwān* which comes close to being a direct

translation of al-Sijistānī's *al-Yanābī'*. Yet, where Nāṣir-i Khusraw actually discussed al-Sijistānī, he chooses to cite only works such as *Kashf al-mahjūb*, *al-Bāhira*, and *Sūs al-baqā'* which are not recognized in any of the major works that have a firmer claim to orthodoxy – at least in terms of al-Sijistānī's own later endorsement of them.<sup>78</sup> Nāṣir-i Khusraw likewise was not attempting to endorse the works he cites but rather to point out that some followers of al-Sijistānī continued to study his non-orthodox writings. Thus, while portions of the later *da'wa* continued to read a selection of al-Sijistānī's problematic treatises, those not a part of the "revised" group and of the time of al-Mu'izz – the ones officially sanctioned – were increasingly neglected, if not abandoned altogether, by the mainstream *dā'īs*.

The major treatises of al-Sijistānī themselves vary in style and content. Of those which continue to exist in anything like a complete form – *al-Maqālīd*, *al-Yanābī'*, *al-Ifikhār*, *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, and *Sullam al-najāt* (although the latter two are incomplete at the end) – three are quite theoretical and in general explore broad philosophical themes, largely without explicitly partisan pronouncements. These are *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, *al-Maqālīd*, and *al-Yanābī'*.<sup>79</sup>

Al-Sijistānī did not write a work specifically on the imamate nor in fact does he discuss it as a political issue except in sections of *Sullam al-najāt* and *al-Ifikhār*. Instead he composed a treatise on prophecy which is heavily philosophical in tone. Unlike his predecessor, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, whose *A'lām al-nubūwa* (*Signs of Prophecy*) focuses almost exclusively on the historical and miraculous fact or facts of particular prophets, al-Sijistānī provided in his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* (*Prophecy's Proof*) a complex demonstration of the necessity of prophecy in terms of a scientific account of the nature of the cosmos and man's place within it. A philosophical view of the meaning and structure of reality, according to al-Sijistānī, establishes the necessity of prophecy. The very rationality of mankind and of nature imposes the acceptance by human beings of God's emissaries. This work is, therefore, primarily concerned with the concordance of science and philosophy with religion and religious obligation.

*Al-Yanābī'* (*Wellsprings*) or *Yanābī' al-ḥikma* (*Wellsprings of Wisdom*, according to one of its alternate titles) is another exploration of elaborate philosophical doctrines. In this treatise al-Sijistānī discusses the metaphysics of God as Originator of the cosmos, spiritual beings such as intellect and soul, and the relationship of the human to all three. Portions of this work are purely Neoplatonic in the tone and in the content of its teachings; other sections bring these concepts in line with the author's Shiite interpretation of religious knowledge and its purveyors, the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

*Al-Maqālīd*, the most extensive of al-Sijistānī's works, again addresses similar problems with a like interest in grand themes rather than polemics. In many cases, nevertheless, the context for an individual chapter in this treatise implies that it is a response to the position of some other writer. Seldom is it possible to identify an immediate source or stimulus for the particular chapter, although it is now clear that some passages in it contain language which

directly parallels portions of the *Longer Theologia* (to be discussed later in chapter 2).

*Al-Iftikhār* is substantially different from these three. Stridently polemical and strikingly defensive and apologetic, its title indicates its tone: *al-Iftikhār* meaning boasting or taking pride – that is, in the teaching of one's own group. What pride could be greater, al-Sijistānī asks rhetorically, than comprehending the real truth and alighting on the right path.<sup>80</sup> Those in error – his opponents – include the ignorant as, for example, the literalists (*al-Ḥashwīya*), the vain such as the dialectical theologians (*al-Mutakallimūn*), and the presumptuous such as the philosophers (*al-Falāsifa*). All disdain true guidance, he says.<sup>81</sup> In the pages of *al-Iftikhār* that follow this list of his detractors, al-Sijistānī outlines exactly what his *madhhab* actually says about *tawhīd*, the angels, the names and their purposes, apostleship, executorship (*al-waṣīya*), the imamate, resurrection, reward, punishment, *al-qiya*ma, and the application of interpretation to the revelation and the law. In every case he tries to show that the professed falsehood of which the “people of truth” (*Ahl al-Ḥaqq*) stand accused is, in fact, more properly true of the doctrines held by those accusing them. The whole hypothetical debate he recorded in this work is an exceedingly frank confession of the points of difference between himself and the Ismaili *da'wa*, on the one hand, and the intellectual, religious world all around him, on the other. In defending his “pride,” he defined his cause and the message of the Ismaili Shiah as well. There is perhaps no better place to look for a definition of that form of Shiism in its fourth/tenth-century manifestation.

Al-Sijistānī's *Sullam al-naǧāt*, at least the portion of it that survives, is similarly concerned with providing a basic statement of what constitutes the Ismaili *madhhab* but in this case without as much of the stridently polemical rhetoric that characterizes *al-Iftikhār* throughout. The elements of the Ismaili creed are, as listed in this work, faith in God, His angels, His books, His emissaries, the last day, salvation after death, and paradise and hellfire.<sup>82</sup>

The final works written by al-Sijistānī more clearly indicate a sectarian position and also a pronounced militancy. *Al-Iftikhār*, in particular, holds back little. Possibly this bold thrust into unreserved, public defense of his cause contributed to his death as a martyr. In *al-Iftikhār*, for example, he voiced such a harsh and bitter denunciation of the Abbasid caliphs that he must have put his life at risk. In any case in none of this group of works does he contradict or alter the teachings of the others. Thus if al-Kirmānī or others found signs that he had changed any of his fundamental notions as, for example, it is suggested in the *Riyāḍ* between ideas found in the *Nuṣra* and *al-Maqālīd* or *al-Iftikhār*, those adjustments occurred prior to the publication of the works now available.

Research into the exact relationship between the works and titles ascribed to al-Sijistānī has really just begun, especially in regard to the problem of earlier and later material. Despite this continuing problem, a firm body of writings represents his thought, and for it the peripheral questions of orthodoxy are less problematic. Therefore it is more productive at this time to delve into the questions involved in

elucidating al-Sijistānī's ideas and their place in Islamic intellectual history by concentrating on those major treatises, cited above, which both Ismaili tradition and internal evidence suggest are accurate expressions of his thought and doctrines.



## Religious and philosophical resources

It is difficult adequately to prepare a modern reader for al-Sijistānī's treatises which provide little or no introductory material – certainly no philosophical introduction of any kind – and, in fact, most often commence with seemingly obscure axioms and propositions. Seldom, if ever, do they spell out what has led up to the position from which they begin, and yet it is equally certain that a substantial history hides behind most of the topics their author chooses to discuss. Al-Sijistānī did not undertake his mission either in an intellectual vacuum or in an isolated sectarian environment. Rather, he belonged to the general, educated elite within Arabic culture; no element of that culture was inaccessible or foreign to him. On the contrary, judging from the range of his knowledge (and that of many of his fellow *dā'īs*), Ismaili Shiism did not promote or harbor a policy of either ignorance or scholarly reticence about investigating the predominant intellectual movements of the time. Because al-Sijistānī deeply appreciated philosophy and science and also understood the necessity of popular religions (both Islamic and pre-Islamic), he created a significant place for all of this in his learning.

Among these factors in al-Sijistānī's background, three areas require particular consideration: Shiism, philosophy, and *kalām*. From within strictly the Islamic religious tradition, Shiism provided al-Sijistānī the basic framework for the majority of his principal concerns and, as a system of thought, it contributed by far the most important single influence in his writings. Philosophy follows in a secondary, but nevertheless essential, position. Moreover, although al-Sijistānī cannot be understood without considering carefully his Shiism, many individual elements in his thinking belong entirely and solely to philosophy. Beyond these two domains, in a distinctly minor role, there is *kalām*, that peculiarly Islamic form of theology and religious apologetics that sought to defend religious dogma with rational argumentation. Various elements within all three of these fields help explain and elucidate the complex background against which al-Sijistānī worked. An examination of these influences in this chapter will make the subsequent confrontation with al-Sijistānī's own ideas and expressions seem less abrupt. Most of al-Sijistānī's fourth/tenth-century readers were already conversant with this

material, and therefore he could assume that many elements of it needed no introduction.

## Shiism

Prior to examining al-Sijistānī's philosophical sources, it is essential to consider the backdrop and circumstances of his Shiism, which is the area of greatest concern for him. His loyalty to the Ismaili branch of Shiism does not necessarily imply that the Shiite doctrines to which he was attached are, in general, strange or unusual. In sharing the common trends of both Zaydi and Imami thought, he was fully attuned to the wider Shiite scholarly perspective. Thus, while a few of his Ismaili tenets set him apart and almost tie him to the so-called Extremists or *ghulāt*, this is generally not the case. In direct contrast to the literature of these groups, al-Sijistānī's writings never suggest, for example, that the imams or the *waṣī* – here meaning 'Alī – is superior to the lawgiving prophet, or articulate a concept holding that the law of the sixth lawgiver, Muḥammad, has ceased to function. For al-Sijistānī, the law under which he lived, both outwardly and inwardly, remains the Islam of the prophet Muḥammad. Its era might be approaching its end but until the Messiah reappears, Islamic law, the *sharī'a*, remains in full force.<sup>1</sup>

One example of a common Shiite theme is the *Ithnā 'asharī* (Imami) doctrine of the twelfth imam's *ghayba* (occultation).<sup>2</sup> A long history of the concept of *ghayba* in the two and a half centuries leading up to this point helps make understandable the context in which al-Sijistānī insists that the seventh imam of the line descending from Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, namely Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, is in *ghayba*. As with the twelfth imam for the rival *Ithnā 'asharīya*, al-Sijistānī awaits the reappearance of his imam/messiah. What does not accord with older ideas in Shiite doctrine, on the other hand, is his additional claim concerning a special set of seven "deputy imams" (*khulafā'*), acting on behalf of this expected messiah during his *ghayba*. The doctrine of *ghayba*, therefore, was a common theme in many Shiite works; but the concept of the *khilāfa* was not.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, however, as set against a backdrop of the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth-century Shiism, only a few prominent issues in the discourse of al-Sijistānī seem unusual or radical. *Ithnā 'asharī* Shiism was given its fullest intellectual expression not quite that early. Of the influential Imami writers, Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991) was roughly contemporary to al-Sijistānī but Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), in many ways an *Ithnā 'asharī* scholar of much greater significance, belongs to the next generation.<sup>4</sup> The differences between the main Shiite factions were, therefore, more fluid in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth century than they were to become a hundred years later.

Another example of a concept al-Sijistānī shares with the other non-Ismaili Shiite groups is a similar concern about the nature of scripture and the authority of its interpretation. An exoteric/esoteric (*ẓāhir/bāṭin*) dichotomy in the understanding of the *Qur'ān* came to be regarded by outsiders as a major characteristic

of Ismaili thought. Clearly, however, it was an inherent feature of some Shiism long before the rise of the Fatimids and the spread of the Ismaili *da'wa*. The matter arose naturally for the Shiah, and to find an explanation of it in the simplest terms, as al-Sijistānī often points out, one need only reflect on the significance of verse seven of *Sūra* 3 (reading it as the Shiah do).<sup>5</sup>

It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the essence of the Book, and others ambiguous . . . and none knows its interpretation (*ta'wīl*), save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*). They say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord"; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.

The existence of ambiguity in the Quranic language is thus admitted even by the sacred text itself – a fact universally recognized by Muslims. But, whereas the Sunni world would deny that any mortal, save possibly the prophet Muḥammad himself, knows the true meaning of those ambiguous (*mutashābiḥa*) verses, the Shiah insist that their interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is known to the imams. The imams are then what is meant by the phrase "those firmly rooted in knowledge"; they are the *rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise an accompanying distinction between the *tanzīl*, which is Arabic for the actual revelation in its codified or scriptural form, and the *ta'wīl*, which is its understood meaning and interpretation, was already formally connected with the career respectively of the prophet and his cousin 'Alī. Basically, 'Alī holds a critically important place in the foundation of the Interpretation, which at this point might be written with a capital "I" to indicate its institutional status. Among most of the Shiah, it is, theoretically, not *an* interpretation but *the* Interpretation.

The sanctification of 'Alī was explained, for them, by a parallel concept of trusteeship (*waṣīya*). 'Alī both inherited the authority of the prophet and was appointed the executor and guardian of the prophet's will and testament. As *waṣī* 'Alī not only carried in himself the spiritual legacy of Muḥammad but held the position of executor and trustee of that bequest. While this language appears worldly, the charge given 'Alī was both physical and, most importantly, spiritual. The choice of 'Alī was that of God Himself. Supporting this was 'Alī's special role in founding and perpetuating the Interpretation. Of necessity an oral teaching, the meaning of law and scripture resides for each generation in the imamate of 'Alī's chosen descendants. This was also, in part, the function of the prophet while he lived. In him the *tanzīl* operated side by side with *ta'wīl*.<sup>7</sup> 'Alī and the imams, however, participate in prophethood (*nubūwa*) at this level alone and not in the reception of revelation. Al-Sijistānī, who fully supports this position, in one place describes the situation as follows: 'Alī inherits only a portion of the power of the prophet and the imams receive from him in turn only a fraction of that.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the imams are all infallible and sinless (*ma'sūm*). Although al-Sijistānī himself seldom dwells on the details of a specific theory of the imamate, many other writers before him did, and it is a common topic in all Shiite literature including that of the Ismailis. Al-Sijistānī's reticence to write at greater length about this most essential Shiite theme may be significant, although

perhaps it merely indicates that it was, in his mind, rooted in the very generic notion of Shiism. He may have felt free to ignore it as a political issue and pursue other topics, more susceptible to theoretical treatment, such as prophethood (*nubūwa*) in general, or the trusteeship and interpretive roles of 'Alī, or the messiahship of the seventh imam. There is at least one other possibility.

As already noted al-Sijistānī held that the imam of his time was in a state of occultation (*ghayba*), although represented in current affairs by a *khalīfa* (caliph). The latter person is certainly the reigning Fatimid caliph, although al-Sijistānī never says this as explicitly as one might expect him to, at least not in the surviving works by him.<sup>9</sup> Was there uncertainty about the imamate during his time? Was he to develop the concept of occultation or of *khilāfa*? Was he to explore the idea of the "two branches" (*al-far'ān*) and particularly the latter (and lower) of the two, assuming the absence of the imam? Similar experiences had perplexed the Shiah in many earlier periods, such as occurred among the *Imāmīya* immediately following the death of the eleventh imam. For example, the early manifestations of the full *Ithnā 'asharī* theory of the *ghayba* were recorded not by al-Nawbakhtī, who wrote at the end of the third/ninth century, but by al-Kulaynī in the *Kāfī* some thirty to forty years later.<sup>10</sup> Hadiths in the latter work, in fact, foreordain the exact list of twelve imams name by name.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the Ismailis, for whom the confusion surrounding the doctrine of the imamate dissipated in the opposite direction over the course of the fourth/tenth century, the extraordinary set of seven *khulafā'*, mentioned by al-Sijistānī as being necessary in the era of Islam, were, by the time of al-Kirmānī, understood as a continually repeating cycle of seven imams, who also held the title *khalīfa* or caliph. At the time of al-Sijistānī, however, such issues were still alive. The occultation of the awaited Messiah was of major concern to him, even while he recognized the interim caliphate (*khilāfa*) of the Fatimids.

Another favorite theme for al-Sijistānī in this area – one which also must have been old – is the historicity of the prophets who preceded Muḥammad. The Ismailis possessed a standard form for this doctrine. Taking a basic clue from the Quranic phrase "*ūlū al-'azm*," which means "those capable of decision or resolution" in religious affairs, they found a pattern in religious history. Although the importance this title accords to those prophets who are mentioned as having it in the *Qur'ān* is not clear, the prophets in question are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. By adding Adam to this list (although he did not possess "*'azm*"),<sup>12</sup> the Ismaili commentators found evidence in the sacred text that exactly six great prophets were responsible for the elaboration of revelation, religion, and its laws – the *sharā'ī'*. Yet another early doctrine held that in the past there had been as many as 313 messenger-prophets (*rusul*) and 124,000 ordinary prophets (*anbiyā'*). The Ismailis, and possibly other of the Shiah before them, reduced these numbers to an orderly, historical scheme. The six major prophets were the lawgivers or *nuṭaqā'* (singular *nāṭiq*) – an Arabic term meaning speaking-prophets, i.e. those who legislate on behalf of God. The rest of the prophets occupy the lesser ranks consisting of the *awṣiyā'* (plural of *waṣī*) – one for each of the

*nāṭiqs*, *a'imma* (plural of *imām*), arranged chronologically in sevens for each sacred epoch, and the *lawāḥiq*.<sup>13</sup> This constitutes, in sum, a vision of sacred history and therefore explains religion in terms of historical development and necessity. Each great prophet first confirms and then supplants his predecessor's message with a new scripture and a more perfect law until reaching perfection with the coming of Muḥammad and Islam.<sup>14</sup>

Yet one more of the typically Shiite elements in al-Sijistānī's writings is his emphasis on the concept of *da'wa*. This hardly by itself separates him from the bulk of the Shiah, or for that matter from many other Muslims. The Ismaili idea of *da'wa*, going beyond its basic sense in which it denotes a "call" or "summons," became a term for the religious organization which constituted the vocation of the agents and other members of it who were arranged hierarchically from the *mu'min* (believer) at the bottom to the imam at the top. What makes the *da'wa* especially important for al-Sijistānī is his notion that its members share some portion of prophetic authority (*nubūwa*), at least to a limited extent. Thus for him the dividing line between absolute knowledge of religion, as it might reside in the person of the imam, and as he might dispense it to his closest followers, is not cut and dried. The *lāḥiq*, who occupies a second rank after the imam, has powers somewhat analogous to the imam's, which operate in his absence. Thus the whole of the *da'wa*, in the eyes of al-Sijistānī, is an *ecclesia* or corporate embodiment of a living teaching based on the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Revelation. Rather than the imam possessing sole and exclusive authority, he shares some portion of it with the lesser ranks in the *da'wa*. How much in this understanding of the role of the *da'wa* predates al-Sijistānī is uncertain, although it is unlikely that he would have advanced such ideas on his own.

In the investigation of what is most peculiar to Ismaili thinking, rather than common to the Shiism of the time, there are numerous questions about the doctrines of less mainstream Shiite groups, many of which existed in the period of the first and second generation of Ismaili writers or earlier but died out later. Among these are several examples of the Extremists, the *ghulāt*, who elevated 'Alī or the imams above the prophet. Anti-Ismaili polemicists sought to tie the movement to obviously heretical Shiah factions, such as the second/eighth century *Khaṭṭābīya*, and there was, in fact, some justification for this. The Ismailis themselves had their own version of *ghulāt* and, among them, doctrines were propagated which without question violated the limits beyond which the establishment figures of the main Ismaili *da'was*, such as al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, also saw heresy. The more respected members of the *da'wa* were fairly quick to condemn any concept that tended to elevate 'Alī and the imams above Muḥammad, or the *ta'wīl* above the *tanzīl*, or that claimed that the authority for the outward observance of Islamic law had ended. Such ideas, however, were prevalent not only among the *ghulāt* of the Shiah in the third/ninth century, but in factions of the *Ismā'īliya* throughout the fourth/tenth century and later as well.

However, the single most characteristic complex of doctrines in the writing of

the Ismailis of this period, aside from their own special account of the imamate, is their peculiar theory of a series of angelic figures who constitute a chain of intermediaries between the prophets and the Creator-God. Together these spiritual beings form a quite distinct religious cosmology which apparently occurs in no other Islamic context.<sup>15</sup> As these doctrines contributed substantially to the basic material which al-Sijistānī included in his own synthesis of Ismaili teachings, they constitute important elements in his background. In spite of his own intense interest in Neoplatonic philosophy, which he might have employed as an alternative cosmological scheme, he did not replace one with the other.

In this alternate, early cosmology, God creates, in the first instance, two angelic figures called *kūnī* and *qadar*. They form the basic roots (*aṣl*, *aṣlān*) of the universe. For al-Sijistānī, it was relatively easy, however, also to call them *'aql* (intellect) and *nafs* (soul) – two Neoplatonic terms. In Arabic *kūnī-qadar* represents in total seven letters of the alphabet: *kāf*, *wāw*, *nūn*, *yā'*, *qā'*, *dāl*, and *rā'*, which are known in Ismaili texts as the seven heavenly letters.<sup>16</sup> These correspond in the heavens to the seven lords of the planetary spheres and in this world to the seven earthly, lawgiving prophets. Each of the latter brings as his revelation one more of the seven letters, until ultimately the Messiah contributes the seventh and not only completes and perfects man's knowledge of the spiritual realities, but ushers in the final phase of human history, just prior to resurrection and judgment.

In addition, a set of three other angelic beings, like *kūnī* and *qadar*, function as intermediaries, this time specifically between God and His legislating prophets. These are *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*, who are also often identified with the Archangels Mikhā'il (Michael), Jibrā'il (Gabriel), and Isrāfīl (Seraphiel). Unlike *kūnī* and *qadar*, who play a cosmic role in the process of creation, these three beings have specific functions in the setting up and preserving of the earthly religious order. They reveal scripture and sacred law by preparing the person who will be the lawgiver to receive revelation and then provide him with the means to ensure its long-term survival.

All this is distinctive of the early Ismailis, more so in fact, than any other part of their thought outside of considerations pertaining to the imamate. Al-Sijistānī inherited these notions and in no discernible way did he reject them. Rather he valiantly attempted a reconciliation between them and his second, more intellectual, attachment to Neoplatonic philosophy.

## Philosophy and the philosophers

In terms of his philosophical background, al-Sijistānī, as with his Shiism, represents no pronounced aberration. The introduction in Arabic of what were then considered non-Islamic subjects, such as logic, mathematics, physics and metaphysics, proceeded rapidly throughout the century before his time. Materials produced in this effort were widely diffused among the educated classes of the major cities, including those of provinces like Sijistan, Khurasan and North-West

Iran. In reading al-Sijistānī's works it does not take long to discover that he took from this Greek philosophical literature an inspiration in the direction of Neoplatonism. While al-Sijistānī's proclivity in that regard is more pronounced in some treatises than in others, it is an undeniable feature of his thinking and is fundamental to much of his approach to philosophical problems. In this he was a part of a relatively select group. Several well-known figures also dabbled in ideas from this philosophical school, and on the whole it enjoyed a flourishing period in the fourth/tenth century. Writers such as Isaac Israeli,<sup>17</sup> Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī,<sup>18</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī,<sup>19</sup> and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'<sup>20</sup> all belong to this same intellectual movement.

Just as the position of al-Sijistānī strictly within the Ismaili movement is difficult enough to determine with any precision, either with reference to his status in regard to earlier or later colleagues or to his role at the given moment when he composed the works now available in his name, his relationship to other philosophers suffers from a similar obscurity. To what degree did he accept, reject or modify the doctrines of those who came before him? This uncertainty applies not only to his Ismaili predecessors, but almost equally to the Muslim philosophers and Neoplatonists who filled the gap between the first of them, al-Kindī, in the middle of the third century and al-Sijistānī in the middle of the next. Doctrines that appear in the later writings often built upon material from older works and therefore the ideas in the later ones are several steps removed from the earliest known sources of Neoplatonic philosophy in Arabic. This process began in the middle of the third century. Al-Sijistānī occupies a relatively late position, being preceded by one, two or three full generations.

Ironically, in a similar manner, al-Sijistānī's reception of Ismaili teachings depended on a generation of *dā'īs* who were active in the latter half of the third century. Almost without question, therefore, each issue in al-Sijistānī's works belonged to a complex, multifaceted debate wherein the major problems had been actively thrown back and forth and were a matter of contention well prior to his own participation in the process. This was especially true for the development of Ismaili theological doctrines in a philosophical form. Philosophy was important in Ismaili thought prior to the early fourth/tenth century. Others before al-Sijistānī had most probably laid claim to the positions he takes or refutes on many issues, although details of the works they wrote are barely discernible. Few of the writings of the first generation have survived. Chief among those that are missing is Muḥammad al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*, which was of seminal importance. Therefore, the rare instances where al-Sijistānī's statements on a given issue and those of the earlier authors both remain assume special importance. Much of this evidence, however, even where it involves philosophical issues, is particular to the Ismaili context and is dealt with, alongside other material concerning al-Sijistānī's Ismaili predecessors, in the following chapter.

Given al-Sijistānī's allegiance to the strict idea of religious authority and to the ultimate superiority of prophetic revelation over scientific investigation and deduction, moderate hostility on his part toward philosophy as a formal discipline

should not be surprising. Al-Sijistānī simply did not consider himself a member of the *falāsifa* (philosophers). He never tells his readers that Greek Neoplatonism is essential to his arguments, nor does he even admit, except rarely, that important works of such philosophy already exist and thus provide a background for his statements. Yet, by many ordinary criteria he was thoroughly imbued with philosophical and scientific attitudes, and these were of a fairly sophisticated sort. Al-Sijistānī obviously consulted the teachings of ancient philosophers, as well as his more openly philosophical contemporaries, even while he attempted to maintain an arm's length distance from them. Instead he coordinated these two sources – namely the revelation and its *ta'wīl*, and science and philosophy – side by side, claiming always that they both agree. For him each provides a different description of an aspect of the same cosmos but both are accurate, although revelation ultimately yields a truth of much greater profundity than philosophy.

Emphasizing al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonism, therefore, does not locate him formally with the philosophers, in part because he himself rejects any explicit connection with them. Neither does he belong among the usual Islamic doctrinal theologians (*mutakallimūn*), for reasons of his proven interest in philosophy. Thus while he was not strictly speaking a philosopher, he certainly exploited philosophical texts and teachings. What sets him apart is his own view that deductive reasoning and demonstrative proofs do not yield knowledge of the most basic truths.<sup>21</sup> The laws and rules necessary for the well being and salvation of mankind are not those expressed by philosophers, nor can this have been true in the past. These depend solely on God's messengers who are the lawgiving prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad and the expected Messiah. Whatever the philosophers might have obtained in the way of these truths, their expression of them is empty and possibly vain unless borrowed from the language and expressions contributed by these sacred prophets.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, al-Sijistānī differs from the dialectical theologians, in part, because of his undisguised interest in explaining points of doctrine by grounding it thoroughly in philosophical reasoning and argumentation. Philosophy is thus deeply imbedded in his thinking, not just as a defensive tool, but as an active pursuit in its own right.<sup>23</sup>

The failure of the great Greek philosophers to match the metaphysical prowess of the prophets, for al-Sijistānī, was because their expressions of the highest values and of supreme reality do not always hold good. The symbols and parables they have created to explain that sublime world contradicted each other. In his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, al-Sijistānī inserts the following passage into a discussion of why prophecy (*al-nubūwa*), never departs from the specific lineage of the Semitic prophets.

In order to grasp prophetic knowledge, the best of the Greek philosophers established a great many of the principles of the physical and mathematical sciences, rising in their understanding of mathematics even to the comprehension of spiritual matters. But despite the keenness of their minds none, not one of them, achieved in ascending to the world of soul a disposition that allowed him to form expressions of that world as commandments and prohibitions or as threats and promises, but only as imitations and symbols, some



portion of which contradicts others. Nor are these established on the basis of demonstrative proof which might make clear what their intellects have discovered, except in so far as this was gleaned from the tongues of the prophets who had preceded them in explaining the first two creations and what exists in their worlds and in affirming the true Originator who originated both worlds by His oneness and will.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Sijistānī's claim is fairly typical of the Ismailis, who consistently credit scientific and philosophical knowledge to the prophetic messengers. Philosophy is not wrong to speak about God as the Originator (*al-mubdi'*), nor is it mistaken in explaining the realms of intellect (*al-'aql*) and soul (*al-nafs*), but what is truly authoritative in its statement of these matters has been, in fact, adopted from the utterances of the prophets.

Al-Sijistānī can also be much harsher in his remarks about philosophy. In the midst of a catalog of the sins committed by the Abbasid caliphs and other historical figures who have opposed the Shiite imams, he faults his opponents for having accepted as their caliph, al-Ma'mūn,

who squandered the public treasury of the Muslims in translating the books of atheistic, Greek, materialist philosophers, an act which resulted in the denial of Muḥammad's prophethood and of the resurrection after death.<sup>25</sup>

He rejects with this statement more than a limited category of philosophers; his purpose is broader, for he intends ultimately to challenge philosophers in general.

He and other Ismaili writers, as in these passages, do not necessarily reject all philosophy but only that portion of it that does not accord with their concept of true knowledge. For them all philosophy is not correct philosophy. Earlier Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī in his *A'lām al-nubūwa*, like al-Sijistānī later, complains about false philosophical ideas and teachings and about those who pretend to know philosophy but whose ideas concerning divine matters constitute a jumble of mutually contradictory opinions. Al-Rāzī laments in that book how hard it is to separate the true and authentic among the philosophers from those who are vain, corrupt or who in Islamic times have deliberately brought into philosophy innovations and falsely attributed these doctrines to the ancient sages. A part of Abū Ḥātim's evidence for this is, to be sure, a pseudo-doxography that abounds in false information.<sup>26</sup>

Still, it was not just the ignorant materialists or other specific types of philosophers that al-Sijistānī rejected but a broad category of philosophers. They taught, according to him, certain specific doctrines that are unacceptable on philosophical as well as religious grounds. The two most important of these, in his mind, are their claim that God is a cause (*'illa*) and is a substance (*jawhar*). In his *al-Maqālīd* al-Sijistānī devoted a chapter to each of these problems, and later in his polemical *al-Iftikhār* he refers back precisely to these two discussions as a conclusive refutation of the philosophers.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Sijistānī frequently admits indirectly to the influence of the ancients or of the philosophers and in a few instances mentions a name of a source

he either has used or one he knowingly rejects. In his extant writings (including the quoted material from his *Nuṣra* as it appears in al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ*), there are references to Galen and his *Book of Demonstrative Proofs* (*Kitāb al-barāhīn*),<sup>28</sup> to Empedocles,<sup>29</sup> and to Aristotle, under the rubric *al-Ḥakīm fī al-manṭiq*<sup>30</sup> or the author of the *Book of the Animal* (*al-Ḥayawān*).<sup>31</sup> This is a remarkably small list but it is matched in brevity by the number of citations by him of other sources.

Altogether the few individuals named by al-Sijistānī are not useful as an indication of which authors or texts influenced his thinking. He refers to such individuals as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī,<sup>32</sup> Abū Ḥanīfa,<sup>33</sup> Abū Bashīr al-Marwazī,<sup>34</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Yahyā b. Ma'īn, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī,<sup>35</sup> Muḥammad b. Karrām,<sup>36</sup> Jahm b. Ṣafwān,<sup>37</sup> and an al-Marīṣī.<sup>38</sup> Most of these he cites solely for the purpose of rejection and, in any case, they are religious, rather than philosophical, figures. The groups he mentions are cited by such names as *al-Awā'il*,<sup>39</sup> *al-Mutafalsif*, *al-Falāsifa*, *Ahl al-Hayūlā* or *Aṣḥāb al-Hayūlā*,<sup>40</sup> *Ahl al-Tanjīm* (or *al-Munajjimūn*),<sup>41</sup> and the Logicians (*al-Manṭiqīyūn*),<sup>42</sup> plus several Islamic sectarian factions. None of these names is specific and all of these groups are his opponents in one way or another. This applies to individuals as well, except al-Marwazī, who, judging from the pious wish al-Sijistānī adds to his mention, must be a fellow *dā'ī*.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps he is al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marwazī (or al-Marwarrudhī), the Amir who preceded al-Nasafī as head of the *da'wa* in Khurasan. If so it is the only reference to a specific colleague. Aside from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī few contemporaries or near contemporaries appear clearly in the pages of al-Sijistānī's treatises. This reservation encompasses both enemy and friend: no other members of the *da'wa* and no imam after Ja'far contributed either ideas or words which he explicitly credits.

Al-Sijistānī's attitude toward such important philosophers as al-Kindī and al-Fārābī is not known. The former was too famous not to have affected al-Sijistānī and the latter too prominent as the major proponent of *falsafa* to ignore (although this was perhaps more the case later than in the time of al-Sijistānī). At the time al-Sijistānī visited Baghdad in 322/934, al-Fārābī was teaching philosophy there, but no direct evidence of contact exists. What about someone like the philosopher Abū Zayd al-Balkhī whose father came from Sijistan and whose own career put him in the service of the Ismaili Amir al-Marwazī?<sup>44</sup> For that matter what about Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, the well-known teacher of logic and philosophy in Baghdad in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, who like Abū Ya'qūb, accepted a form of Neoplatonism?<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, despite a superficial resemblance in a few ideas and doctrines, there is no real evidence of an overt connection between these authors and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, either personally or intellectually. None of them was mentioned in al-Sijistānī's own writings.

Curious among the possible but unconfirmed influences on al-Sijistānī is a possible connection with the Jewish Neoplatonist, Isaac Israeli, who was the court physician to the first Fatimid caliph al-Mahdī. There is no reliable, confirmed

evidence linking the two, although a similar (but not identical) use of the Arabic Neoplatonic texts, especially elements from the *Longer Theologia*, shows up in the writings of both. It is more likely, given the little that is already known, that a direct connection existed between Israeli and al-Nasafī since they were contemporaries. Therefore the secret to assessing al-Sijistānī's relationship to Israeli may, in part, lie in figuring out what exactly he owed to al-Nasafī in whose defense he wrote his *Nuṣra*. This is a problem not easily resolved since the *Maḥṣūl* is now lost. What can be said about al-Nasafī in the present state of research follows in the next chapter.

Al-Fārābī is yet another matter. If, as appears likely, this ardent champion of philosophy lived in approximately the same period as al-Sijistānī, a comparison of their respective approaches to Islamic philosophical issues is bound to be of special significance. It is certainly possible that one influenced the other, although if this did happen, it was most likely al-Fārābī who inspired al-Sijistānī and not the other way around. The common area in their thought is the importance accorded the lawgiver, who is called by both *wāḍi' al-nāmūs* or *al-nawāmīs*, among other designations.<sup>46</sup> Both maintain that the expression of the law or a set of laws, only operates via symbols, parables, and similitudes which mirror a real, timeless truth. The former is keyed to a time and place within a specific language; the latter is eternal and is the ultimate reality of the higher, intellectual or spiritual world. The law (and religion) must vary with the particular peoples and conditions of the mundane world in whose earthly circumstances it has to function. For al-Fārābī, it is the philosopher, through access to demonstrative reasoning, who gains a knowledge of that truth of which religion and the law is only a similitude. For al-Sijistānī, this is not the case because at its highest level the deductive enterprise falls short and only revelation suffices. Although he, too, explains the difference between philosopher and *nabī* (or *nubūwa*) by the power of the latter to create the outward, symbolic form of the scriptural law and the incapacity of the former to do so, al-Sijistānī would not concede, as al-Fārābī does, that the truth obtainable by each method separately is, in fact, equal.

Another conceptual and schematic difference between these two contemporaries was critical in the subsequent development of Islamic philosophy. Al-Fārābī studied and sifted carefully the Aristotelian legacy and extracted from it a notion of what philosophy is, which became, in the enormously successful work of Ibn Sīnā, the standard definition of philosophy itself. Philosophy (*falsafa*) in the Arabic world henceforth became more or less exactly what al-Fārābī understood to be the teaching of Aristotle and his theory of the "demonstrative science." Therefore, all other forms of Greek philosophy, including that of Plato, began to conform to this singular concept or to be abandoned and ignored. Plato's "theological" or "divine" teachings were thereafter just that – a "theology" – but not "philosophy." This was true to a certain extent of Aristotle but only for those very few followers of al-Fārābī who continued to believe that the *Theologia*, attributed to Aristotle, was really a valid work of his. A more common result was that Neoplatonism, which is this theological side of Plato and which Aristotle,

according to some, also had propounded via the *Theologia*, ceased to be philosophy in the eyes of the hard core *falāsifa*.<sup>47</sup>

Al-Sijistānī, in contrast, saw in this theological tradition of the Greeks an immensely fruitful source of ideas, concepts, and words. Its vocabulary (in Arabic translation) became his; its primary concepts provided him key answers for some of his major problems; and its internal conflicts infected his discourse and that of others who shared a similar desire and interest in speaking philosophically about such topics as God, creation, the soul and salvation.

Significantly, al-Sijistānī chose not to compose treatises specifically on philosophical themes. Given his knowledge of the subject he might have, and this is clear in any number of individual chapters in his work. Some are by themselves small philosophical treatises, although they are always contained within a larger context that has a religious motive. Ostensibly, Islam dominates al-Sijistānī's thinking entirely; but unlike some of his contemporaries who refused to look outside scripture and hadith, he had no hesitation in doing so. He practiced philosophy in the sense that he studied it, read the major texts, and brought the results of that investigation to bear on the great problems that were his main concern. Drawing on the Arabic remnants of ancient Greek thought unabashedly – to the point of employing its technical language and possibly borrowing whole passages and arguments from it – he found that it provided him in turn with some of his best answers to major theological problems. He rejoiced as well in the analogies and parallels between the worlds of natural creation (*'ālam al-ṭabī'a* and *'ālam al-naḥs*), which were best explained by the natural sciences, and the world of religious obligation (*'ālam al-waḍ'*), which had been ordained by the prophets. In the end al-Sijistānī would have quickly admitted that the professional philosophers and scientists could express better the particular operating principles of the physical world than the cryptic symbolism of the uninterpreted words of the *Qur'ān* and other revelations.

What allowed al-Sijistānī to combine science and religion so freely? Possibly, his Shiite mistrust of the literal or outward wording of the sacred revelation prompted him to look behind it for non-apparent meanings and implications. The Ismailis were not literalists in any sense, and therefore they had no stock in preserving the outward, non-allegorical meaning of scripture. The conflict between science and religion, accordingly, may have disappeared in the process of interpretation. Perhaps, also, the Ismaili tradition itself, being as it was already long out of the main stream and not in contention for the hearts and minds of the most conservative wing of Islam, no longer required protection against traditional literalism. Regardless of whether these two explanations are valid in this specific case, it is undeniable that al-Sijistānī's cosmopolitan attitude to his sources belongs to the high intellectual tradition within Islam and possibly even within the Ismaili Shiah, not all of whom can have pretended to be at home with the more abstruse and abstract of his ideas.

## Neoplatonism

Even within that high intellectual tradition, al-Sijistānī, like only a handful of his Ismaili colleagues, stands out for one special facet of his thought, his adherence to Neoplatonism. Moreover, his is a remarkably orthodox attachment to many of its basic principles and concepts in a way quite unusual in the Arabic world at large. For example God, for him, transcends all being (and non-being). God is not a cause or a substance. Intellect does not multiply and soul is a separate universal being. These are key doctrines in defining Neoplatonism. This is not to say, however, that there was in al-Sijistānī's time anything like a formal school of Neoplatonism, or even a name for it. This branch of philosophy went nameless, and its major Greek authors lived anonymous lives or were falsely called Aristotle due to mistaken attributions of authorship. The term Neoplatonism, in any event, is the invention of modern historians of philosophy. They designate by it Plotinus' highly important re-working of Plato, which became, due to the force of Plotinus' own originality, a new and distinctive school in its own right, although perhaps the word "school" is not here as appropriate as in other situations. Plotinus' immediate disciples, Porphyry and Jamblichus, and more remote followers like Proclus continued to see themselves as restating and refining the master Plato rather than Plotinus. Nevertheless, a true gauge of what is or is not Neoplatonism must be primarily the ideas of Plotinus with, possibly, some modifications to them by the later writers. In the Arabic world this meant those texts discussed below, beginning always with the shorter *Theologia* – itself, of course, for the most part a work of Plotinus. Conceivably, there was other material now lost; some concepts may have been transmitted orally.

The core of Plotinus' teaching is his insistence that intelligible reality is composed of exactly three hierarchically related elements: the One, intellect or mind, and soul. Below soul is a realm that is physical in nature and in which there is man, although because the human spirit possesses soul mankind also participates in spiritual being. The object of philosophy and the philosophical life is to understand properly what is this divine part of man and to restore it to the true relationship with the world of universal intelligibility and ultimately to achieve some form of union with the transcendental source of all being which is the One or the Good. The universe of intellect is in its total order and structure static and eternal, everlasting without beginning or end, although it gives rise to and governs the lower mundane world where man resides and where things continually undergo cycles of generation and decay, alteration and change.

In general what distinguishes Neoplatonism from other forms of ancient philosophy is the way all three elements of this scheme retain their distinctive places in it. The One, intellect, and soul – Plotinus' three hypostatic elements of the intelligible universe – were often reduced in Islamic philosophy by the non-Neoplatonists, who tended to combine elements, either by making the One an intellective being or by equating universal soul with some form of secondary intellect.

The One of Plotinus is, as it was for Plato, beyond being and therefore beyond intellectual being. It transcends all duality in Its absolute simplicity; it is in Greek *hyper-ousion*, not *an-ousion* – that is, above being and not non-being. The immediate appeal of this concept to al-Sijistānī will become obvious in a later chapter on his concept of God and *tawhīd*. Here it is essential to note that, as non-intellective, the One cannot be known rationally. Theology in Neoplatonism is necessarily negative despite the positive fact of creation which is the result of the overwhelming perfection of the First principle. God overflows and thus creates because He is so absolutely perfect. Perfection entails giving.

Plotinus' One which utterly transcends all being and non-being – it can never be thought of, for example, as the primitive one which produces and exists in all other numbers and numbering – is best understood in reference to the second hypostasis which is intellect or mind. The overflowing of perfect goodness initiates by emanation a simple being, like a light coming from the sun. In turning back in contemplation toward the origin on account of which it has being, the intellect is informed and filled up with content, thereby actually becoming both being and intellect. But unable to receive or comprehend the One as a whole, it breaks it up and makes it many within itself, becoming thus a unity-in-diversity. It is the perfection of intuitive thought which is identical with its object. The mind is what it thinks, a reflective analysis which brings to light different aspects of the same whole. The intellect is the first existent being and is universal and immutable, the repository of all mind, indivisible. Its realm is the truly real. The mind is all things; to be and to know are the same.

The third hypostasis is soul, a wide-ranging, intermediate substance positioned on the inner horizon of intellect. Soul is the cause of nature and of sense perception. It reasons and thinks but whereas intellect thinks intuitively, soul cogitates in a discursive fashion. To understand it must move from one idea to another. This activity generates time. The immediate creator and governor of the physical world is soul; it ranges between the intellect, from which it ceaselessly derives its orderly intelligible qualities, and nature, to which it imparts what it has learned in the form of instructions for the betterment of the sensible world. Individual soul is a part of universal soul; it is the divine in man. At the basest point soul disappears into darkness because it has become remote from goodness and beauty.

These few paragraphs hardly begin to explain Neoplatonism, but they are included both to draw attention to a few of its particular features and to set the stage for what follows in which the points of difference between al-Sijistānī and other philosophers are crucial.<sup>48</sup> Three distinctive themes remain paramount. For the Neoplatonists: (1) God or the One retains His position of absolute, unqualified transcendence; (2) intellect does not multiply; and (3) universal soul continues to exist as soul and not as some form of intellect. Significantly, nothing in the writing of al-Sijistānī fails to support or attempts to contradict in any substantial way these essential points.

## Textual sources

The Neoplatonic tradition in the Islamic world depended on the existence of a set of Arabic works which purported to be translations of Greek material. Therefore, a major specific focus for research concerning the influence of textual sources on al-Sijistānī is assessment of his reception of material from these primary documents in the development of Islamic, Neoplatonic doctrines. Al-Sijistānī was not reacting merely to these works in themselves, however, but to an already established set of commentaries or works in which the ideas from them were incorporated in a secondary context. His statements on any given point are often not a direct comment on or a reflection of the original Arabic wording of the Greek (or pseudo-Greek) text but rather a correction or elaboration of an earlier reaction to that material.<sup>49</sup> Generally, moreover, he did not use any of these sources without substantially altering the material he borrowed from them.

Four principal texts each purporting to be translations of ancient Greek carried the greatest weight in the development of the thought of Islamic Neoplatonists. None of these was ever cited by name by al-Sijistānī. Foremost among them is the shorter *Theologia*,<sup>50</sup> followed by the *Longer Theologia*, if it or its non-Plotinian material ever passed as a separate treatise(s),<sup>51</sup> on which it is now certain al-Sijistānī drew fairly substantially. The other two are the *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr* (known in Latin as *Liber de causis*)<sup>52</sup> and the pseudo-Ammonius *Fī ārā' al-falāsifa bi-khtilāf al-aqāwīl fī al-mabādī'* (hereafter referred to simply as the *Pseudo-Ammonius*).<sup>53</sup>

The *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr* is one piece of what survived in Arabic translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*.<sup>54</sup> The influence of the Proclus material has not yet been traced specifically to al-Sijistānī or the other Ismailis but it remains a likely source for them nevertheless.<sup>55</sup> The *Pseudo-Ammonius* is a doxographical collection of various opinions of the ancient Greeks on key theological issues. In it the opinions voiced in the name of the several philosophers quoted seldom correspond to their actual teachings. But, on the other hand, they do provide important elements of Neoplatonic doctrines.

The *Pseudo-Ammonius* figures prominently in two chapters of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī's *A'lām al-nubūwa*,<sup>56</sup> where he used it as proof that philosophy, rather than generating certain truth, yields its practitioner mere opinions. The same treatise must surely lie behind al-Sijistānī's occasional references to the internal disagreement of the ancients. More importantly, as the editor of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* has shown, al-Nasafī in several places seems to quote or paraphrase certain of the opinions expressed in it.<sup>57</sup> These passages now survive as quotations in al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ*, which is itself a detailed record of a controversy generated within the *da'wa* by al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*. In addition to the material in the *Riyāḍ*, there are passages of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* in an early Ismaili work by a *dā'i* named Abū Tammām, the *Kitāb al-shajara*, which also has al-Nasafī's *Maḥṣūl* as one of its ultimate sources.<sup>58</sup> Abū Tammām was most likely a member of the *da'wa* in Khurasan and certainly in some way a disciple of al-Nasafī. The

existence of these quotations in his *Shajara* suggest strongly that al-Nasafī drew on portions of the Ammonius text in his own attempt at creating an Ismaili Neoplatonism.

What complicates this issue of influences is the nature of the extant version of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. As it now exists in its unique manuscript, it might well be the work of an Ismaili compiler since it commences with an introduction combining both an explicit recognition of the "Master of the Age" (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) and a clear Neoplatonic reference to intellect and soul and the emanations therefrom. The "author" of the work therefore is not the Ammonius named in the text but probably an Ismaili *dā'ī* with Neoplatonic interests. Furthermore, the text claims that it will "describe" (*waṣafa*?) the book of Ammonius on philosophical opinions and thus prove the difficulty (or impossibility) the philosophers have in gaining knowledge of the spiritual realm without referring to prophetic authority. Philosophical disagreement about these matters is a sure sign of the philosophers' failure.<sup>59</sup>

Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī used this material in his *A'lām al-nubūwa* for the same purpose although he does not name his source. He does, however, provide there a complete summary of what is now available as the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. No earlier writer is known to have consulted this work (unless al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl* is itself earlier).<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the existence of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* may be due to Ismaili interest in proving the philosophers wrong, or at least predominantly so. The motive in both cases is to demonstrate philosophical incoherence specifically in areas involving knowledge of the spiritual realm, i.e. the world of intellect, soul, origination and the Originator. Thus it must be decided whether and to what extent the text of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* actually represents an older doxography which thereafter became a source for the Islamic Neoplatonists or whether it was compiled within the Ismaili *da'wa* for its own purposes and therefore was based on material gathered by them. A similar problem, after all, exists in regard to the *Longer Theologia*, to be discussed below. Whatever the outcome of these investigations, it is virtually certain that the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, in approximately the same form as it is now known, circulated freely in the Ismaili *da'wa* and was therefore without doubt consulted by al-Sijistānī and others.

The *Pseudo-Ammonius* contains a single, fairly consistent Neoplatonic teaching within its catalog of the different (and contradictory) ways of viewing such problems as creation *ex nihilo* and others. For a later writer to employ it as a source, nevertheless, requires that person to select only certain views recorded in it under the names of the various ancient sages. Some means or criterion of selection must be employed. A standard by which to discriminate is not totally obvious unless it is the occasionally expressed view of the author, meaning here either the "compiler" or Ammonius, whichever is in fact the narrator. This would happen only if later readers of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* well understood the issues and ramifications involved. And it suggests the existence of other sources known to the Ismaili writers prior to their encounter with it.

A better candidate for the major source of Islamic and Ismaili Neoplatonism is



the *Theologia*, which was certainly the most famous work in this philosophical genre. It was so frequently cited or quoted in Arabic that few serious scholars of philosophical ideas, if any, can have missed reading it and being influenced to a degree by it. Some, like al-Fārābī, accorded it minimal importance.<sup>61</sup> Others, perhaps chief among them the Ismaili Neoplatonists beginning with al-Nasafī, were profoundly beholden to it in some way. What ought to follow are the exact details of how these writers used and understood it, but that is not as readily apparent. The general tenor of Islamic Neoplatonism without question owes its overall tone to the existence in Arabic of the *Theologia*, but not of all its individual doctrines. This merely increases the obscurity and darkness surrounding this text and its history, raising many unresolved questions about when and where some miscellaneous sections from Plotinus' *Enneads* numbers IV, V, and VI got transformed into the Arabic work called Aristotle's *Theologia*. Because the translator lived in the third/ninth century and its editor was al-Kindī, it must have already existed in that form prior to its reception by its first generation of Ismaili students.<sup>62</sup>

Any analysis of al-Sijistānī's thought must assume that the shorter *Theologia* plays a major role in its background, and in the sections which follow many general and specific correlations between his writings and this work are spelled out. Here, in contrast, it might be useful to outline a few points that prove that there are serious differences as well. Although the following items are technical, overall they argue for the independence of al-Sijistānī.

The *Theologia*, as an example, fairly constantly employs the eighth form of the verb *bada'a* – *ibtada'a* – rather than the fourth, *abda'a*, as does al-Sijistānī. It denotes that special kind of creation that brings forth divine or spiritual beings. The shorter *Theologia* uses it for origination at several levels, including the originating of soul from intellect. Yet, in another place it describes things which "gush" (*inbajasa*) from the One.<sup>63</sup> Al-Sijistānī not only never uses *ibtada'a*, but always restricts *abda'a* to the single origination of the cosmos from nothing by God and for him *inbajasa*, "gushing forth," refers to the production of soul from intellect and that only. In the shorter *Theologia* God is called a cause (*'illa*).<sup>64</sup> This is a concept al-Sijistānī specifically rejects and he attributes this notion to the Philosophers. It is not impossible that one evidence for him concerning their doctrine on this point is the *Theologia* itself.

The other fragments of Plotinus in Arabic should be treated with the *Theologia* here as a single source in evaluating the background of al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonism.<sup>65</sup> There is a striking affinity of style and vocabulary in all this material, showing, perhaps, that it is all the work of a single hand.<sup>66</sup> The additional passages have significant parallels in al-Sijistānī's writings but also remarkable differences. In this material the first cause – the One – is said to be *huwīya*,<sup>67</sup> an Arabic technical term which might be translated in English as "identity," "being," or "self." The first is therefore pure "self." Al-Sijistānī explicitly denies this idea, and it is tempting here also to see his rejection as a reference to this Plotinian text.<sup>68</sup>

The One is also seen there as the first and thus not as transcending rank and position entirely, as al-Sijistānī would have it.<sup>69</sup> Again, according to this material intellect is not logos, the Word, *al-Kalima*, nor is there logos in it,<sup>70</sup> but it is an axiom of al-Sijistānī that the Word, once created (or uttered) by God, is thereafter identical with intellect. Finally, the fragment in question holds that the Originator (*Mubdi'*) is not a thing but rather is all things.<sup>71</sup> This pantheistic concept is not really out of place in al-Sijistānī's metaphysics but this is something he avoids admitting on a consistent basis.

A review of the evidence thus reveals the complexity involved in the search for al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonic sources – a problem further confused by the complicated situation of the *Longer Theologia*. This version corresponds to a late, medieval Latin translation known in Europe only since the sixteenth century. Its Arabic origin has a history even more obscure than any of the other Neoplatonic pseudo-epigraphies. Much of the primary evidence for it comes from Jewish circles in the Arabic world,<sup>72</sup> commencing as long ago as the time of Isaac Israeli, who himself consulted and quoted some of the portions in it which are not in the shorter version.<sup>73</sup> The exact relationship between the two versions in terms of provenance and authorship is not known, although the shorter *Theologia* is far more accurate in conveying Plotinus than the extraneous material which, in contrast, abounds in the longer version. In fact none of the extra bits and pieces in the latter goes back to the *Enneads*.

The extra portions range in size from words and short phrases to passages of several pages in length. At times they are mere repetitions by restatement of something already explained in the text. At other times, however, they substantially add to or alter Plotinus' arguments and not infrequently bring in totally unrelated information and new doctrines. Some of the longer additions may reflect separate treatises now incorporated whole or in part in this *Theologia*.

In 1954 Professor S. Pines brought the question of the influence of the longer *Theologia* on the Ismaili Neoplatonists into the debate about the sources of the latter by noting that the few passages then available of its Arabic original were strikingly similar to known Ismaili doctrines.<sup>74</sup> The correspondence in the limited passages analyzed by him is, in fact, almost exact, so much so that Professor Pines, at the time, was willing to entertain the notion that the longer version might be the work of an Ismaili editor or compiler. Thus the influence would be reversed, the Ismailis having reworked the *Theologia* into a treatise of Ismaili theology. Such a conclusion parallels the suggestion made earlier about the provenance of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*.

Recent studies now based on a fairly complete preliminary edition of the Arabic text, however, indicate that the problem is not susceptible to such a neat solution. The set of doctrines that drew Professor Pines to this answer belong to only one type of the extra material, others being much less easily identified with known Ismaili sources.

It remains true, however, of the particular doctrine in question, which is the Word or *kalima*, called equally in the *Longer Theologia*, the Command (*amr*),

Will (*irāda*), Power (*qudra*), and Knowledge (*‘ilm*), is definitely characteristic of the Ismaili writers. According to this material, for example, prior to the existence of intellect, the Word was non-being (*lays*) and subsequent to its origination it is united to intellect in such a manner that they are identical. Reverberations of this notion will reappear in the next chapter which discusses the ideas of Abū Ḥātim and al-Nasafī and the following material from al-Sijistānī. Pines was quite correct in his assessment of the Ismaili character of this set of doctrines. They correspond precisely to ideas that hold a vital place in early Ismaili hierarchical metaphysics. Although Pines in 1954 was able only to find a few parallel passages in the writings of the later Persian *dā‘ī* Nāsir-i Khusraw, these eventually proved to have come from the works of al-Sijistānī.<sup>75</sup>

Now there is abundant additional evidence of a more direct sort. Al-Sijistānī’s *al-Maqālīd*, which like the Arabic text of the *Longer Theologia* remains unpublished, contains numerous bits and pieces of material that also appear in the latter.<sup>76</sup> These include both what seem to be quotations by al-Sijistānī and also reused phrases and sentences which he has carefully adapted to the specific context and purpose of his own treatise. Almost without doubt it is al-Sijistānī who draws on an older text and not the other way round. As is the case with the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, Ismaili doctrine at these points does not exactly match what was said in the non-Ismaili work, although in many places it is extremely close. Al-Sijistānī (or al-Nasafī) had to adopt this other material with a careful regard for the changes required to bring it into conformity with his own teachings. It is highly unlikely that any writer in Arabic would have attempted a reverse role – that is, to take an Ismaili text and doctor it to look like it might have been a part of a peculiarly Greek philosophical work.

A more precise answer about the relationship between the *Maqālīd* and the *Longer Theologia* will require further research in both.<sup>77</sup> Here it may suffice to note the connection and to offer some examples that illustrate how al-Sijistānī employed it. In one passage he introduces a sentence by saying “And it is said” (*wa qad qīla*). What follows is almost, but not quite, word for word from the *Longer Theologia*.<sup>78</sup> That certainly demonstrates that the sentence in question is not a statement of al-Sijistānī himself, but more to the point it indicates an outside text or source. There are, in fact, a large number of additional sentences and some longer passages in the *Maqālīd* which repeat the words of the *Longer Theologia*. A good example is the following definition of soul:

Soul is a moving substance that moves with spiritual motion. It is dyed with spiritual colors and takes benefit from what is above it and gives benefit to those below (*Longer Theologia*).

Soul is an eternally moving substance, dyed with spiritual colors, taking benefit from what is above it to what is below it (*al-Maqālīd*).<sup>79</sup>

Little of this material follows its source in exact order; instead sentences, phrases, and short passages from it are scattered throughout the *Maqālīd*, being used there where appropriate to the marshaling of argumentation according to

al-Sijistānī's particular purpose. He often transposes the arrangement of the sentences and will change terms and phrases to suit his own concepts.

The result of a preliminary investigation reveals that al-Sijistānī's source corresponds only to specific sections of the *Longer Theologia* and apparently not to the rest of it (or for that matter to the shorter version). Additional comparisons involving *al-Maqālīd* may yet prompt a different conclusion, but at the moment the evidence so far uncovered suggests that there are in the *Longer Theologia* the remnants of a separate treatise from which al-Sijistānī borrowed extensively for both his language and ideas. This was, it should be noted, also the conclusion of Stern in regard to Israeli's use of similar material from the same work.<sup>80</sup>

## Kalām

A final source of influence on al-Sijistānī is Islamic *kalām*. The English word "theology" can be misleading when used in reference to Islamic thought because it commonly translates the Arabic term "*kalām*" which is not its precise match. *Kalām* is basically "disputation"; to practice *kalām* means to argue in matters of religion. *Kalām* eventually, however, encompassed a broad field of important issues and these, or at least some of them, became the major components of Islamic theological doctrine. In al-Sijistānī's universe of the early to mid fourth/tenth century, the most important school of *kalām* was that of the Mu'tazilites. He pre-dates the development of Ash'arism, although not al-Ash'arī himself who died in 324/935–6. Both al-Ash'arī and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) were exact contemporaries of Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943). Māturīdī, moreover, wrote two works of refutation against the Ismailis and al-Nasafī. But although the position of either of these Sunni theologians was perhaps well known to al-Sijistānī, the later, full expression of the schools of *kalām* which bear their names did not exist that early. On several issues, moreover, al-Sijistānī appears to have begun with a Mu'tazilite concept or point of view and thus owes them some credit for his own position. Most often, however, the ideas he borrowed subsequently evolved in his hands or that of other *dā'īs* until they became something quite different. Al-Sijistānī never admitted to the Mu'tazilite influence on his thought or gave them credit, but al-Kirmānī did in at least one significant case. Since the subject where this did happen – that of the Ismaili understanding of God's transcendence and the issue of the *ṣifāt* by the use of double negation – harkens back to a major theme from the writings of al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī's forthright testimony as to Mu'tazilite influence must surely be accurate for his predecessor as well.<sup>81</sup>

The Muslim sects mentioned by al-Sijistānī are the following: *al-Karrāmīya*, *al-Murjī'īya*, *al-Najjārīya*, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, *al-Khawārij*, *al-Rawāfiq*, and *al-Mu'tazila*.<sup>82</sup> Of his own group about whom he is strangely reluctant to speak except in vague, general terms – never naming names of colleagues or citing specific books of theirs – he is nevertheless clear. They are the *Ahl al-Ta'wīl*, the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq* or *Ahl al-Ḥaqq*. Their books, he admits, were already numerous

and widely spread, and the movement behind them had become the subject of intense polemical criticism. As he says himself,

Indeed the books expounding the beliefs of the People of Truth have multiplied and their appeal has been spread in all quarters, falling thereby into the hands of both the deserving and the undeserving for many reasons that are too obvious to need repeating in this book. Among the books attributed to our own creed, there are many whose authors did not treat themselves fairly by anticipating to which of their points the opponents would object. They thus composed their books bare of the proofs which might preserve them from the calumny of slanders and the contentions of disputatious people. They mixed paltry with sturdy pronouncements. Opponents rely on the existence of an entry point for their calumny or an access for the issues of contention. When they discovered such an entry point for calumny and the access for their contention, they were quick to zero in on that by abandoning what was sturdy in favor of the paltry.<sup>83</sup>

Thus if *'ilm al-kalām* is the science of religious disputation, al-Sijistānī here clearly voices a concern that members of his *da'wa* have neglected its pursuit and hence failed to defend properly the positions they espouse. He alludes to his own intention to rectify the situation.

Dispute in this instance may or may not equal *kalām* in the normal Islamic sense. In looking closely at the form and content of al-Sijistānī's writing, it is obvious that his interests and principal concerns are not those of most contemporary *mutakallimūn*, except in a relatively few matters. Therefore, while it is possible to derive answers to a standard list of *kalām* problems, such for example as the definition of faith, the concept of *tawhīd*, resurrection after death, punishment and recompense, and others, from statements in his treatises, many do not appear at all. Examples of these would include the attributes (*ṣifāt*) of God, His justice (*'adl*), the status of the sinning Muslim, the vision (*ru'ya*) of God, and the reality of Quranic eschatology. Al-Sijistānī's philosophical position in many of these issues pre-empts the Ash'arite or even the Imami-Mu'tazilite evaluation of them. And his, as well as the general Ismaili, concept of interpretation (*ta'wīl*), which automatically includes an allegorical understanding of the literal words of scripture, reduces sharply the area of common argumentation between him and most Sunni (particularly Ash'arite) theologians.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, the principal treatises of al-Sijistānī, such as *al-Yanābī'*, *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* and *al-Maqālīd* (not to mention the *Kashf al-mahjūb* and *al-Nuṣra*), are organized without regard to issues in *kalām* but rather according to philosophical themes and arguments. Thus their relationship to contemporary doctrinal works by other theologians is fairly distant. *Al-Iftikhār* and *Sullam al-najāt*, his final two works, do follow more closely traditional religious subjects, but they do so in such a peculiarly Ismaili manner that they also reveal few if any traces of ordinary *kalām* in either form or content.

## Ismaili predecessors

The sense of engagement in an intellectual religious struggle against his critics, so prominent and unavoidable in al-Sijistānī's latter works *al-Iftikhār* and *Sullam al-najāt*, is almost equaled in the earlier ones by his impatience with his own predecessors. Yet al-Sijistānī owed an immense debt himself both to an unknown group of philosophers who wrote or compiled the Neoplatonic materials in Arabic discussed in the preceding chapter, and to colleagues in the Ismaili *da'wa* who began the scholarly tradition he later took up. These colleagues, moreover, were themselves philosophically inclined in many instances. Therefore it is necessary at this point to explore how much and to what degree philosophy had already penetrated the thinking of the *dā'īs* before his time.

### Early Ismaili doctrine and the advent of philosophy

The earliest clear indication of distinct doctrinal activity on the part of the Ismailis comes from the second half of the third/ninth century, perhaps as early as mid-century. What is known of Ismaili doctrines from that period, however, does not include any of the philosophical material that appears later with al-Nasafī and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī. Therefore an investigation of the process whereby Ismaili doctrines developed from still inadequately explained Shiite lore, which circulated at the end of the third/ninth century, into the sophisticated and complex pronouncements of the great philosophical theologians, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, fifty to a hundred years later, ought to be quite instructive, if this process can in fact be described as a development from one distinct stage to another. Some scholars argue that Ismailism grew in a series of steps and moves over time from primitive expressions of cosmological doctrines through ever more elaborate stages by the incorporation of material learned from the study of Greek philosophy and sciences. While this is not impossible, certain evidence also suggests otherwise – the essential question being a matter of dating the introduction of various elements in Ismaili doctrine.

Two modern scholars, S. M. Stern and Heinz Halm, concentrated their investigations of this problem on material which reveals that one form of Ismailism accepted a view of the cosmos and creation expressed in a myth of a

predominately Gnostic character.<sup>1</sup> The mythic material they have identified represents an older doctrine, although the definitive evidence for it is lacking prior to the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. Their view sees some form of the following account as the oldest cosmological doctrine of the Ismaili movements:

He [God] existed when there was no space, no eternity, no time no things occupying space and no minute of time. When He conceived a will and a wish, He created a light and produced out of this light a creature. This light remained for some length of its eternity not knowing whether it was a creator or a created thing. Then God breathed into it a spirit and directed at it a voice: “Be!” (*kun*), thus it came into being with God’s permission. All things were made by God through creating them (*mubda’atan*) from the letters *kāf* and *nūn* [= the word *kun*]. There is bringing-into-being, one who brings-into-being, and a thing which is brought-into-being. Then there is Allah. Then through the *waw* and the *yā’*, which became a name for what is above it, calling it therefore *kūnī*.

Then the command of the Creator of all things went to *kūnī*: “Create for yourself out of your own light a creature to act for you as vizier and helper and to carry out our command.” Thus it created a creature out of its light and gave it a name, calling it *qadar*. Through *kūnī* God brought to being (*kawwana*) all things, and through *qadar* He determined them.<sup>2</sup>

This statement actually comes from the writing of a *lā’ī* who lived at the court of the Fatimids under al-Mu’izz and is therefore contemporary with al-Sijistānī, not earlier. The information in it, however, is largely confirmed in Zaydi records going back to the beginning of the century and in the writings of other *dā’īs*, including among them al-Sijistānī himself. As common Ismaili doctrine, its wide acceptance among members of the *da’wa*, and its recognition by outsiders as a standard Ismaili teaching, argues forcefully that it constituted an essential part of their intellectual program at least from the late third/ninth century.

What may not be as obvious is whether or not it is, in its entirety, an older form of Ismaili cosmology that was only later replaced by more philosophical concepts. The argument of Stern and Halm is substantially this and a fair amount of evidence supports their conclusions. The problem with such statements as that of Abū ‘Īsā al-Murshid, quoted above, are terms and concepts it shares with the writings of, for example, the heavily Neoplatonizing al-Sijistānī, and even occasionally the later and more Aristotelian al-Kirmānī. Any suggestion that al-Sijistānī’s work reveals a development from a non-philosophical cosmology to a Neoplatonic one is insupportable.<sup>3</sup> His *al-Iftikhār*, in which he resolutely defends the principal details of this cosmology is a relatively late production.<sup>4</sup> Rather than accept this interpretation, it is just as likely that several forms of doctrine existed side by side and thus, while it is undeniable that part, like *kūnī qadar*, the seven heavenly letters, and *jadd, fath*, and *khayāl*, must be old, they are possibly no more so than *amr* (the “command” of God) and *kalima* (the “word” of God), which may be from yet another tradition, even though they were mixed together by the time of Abū ‘Īsā. All are parts of a complex set of basic Ismaili doctrines from an early phase. These might well have included some terms and concepts belonging to Islamic philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Most, if not all – both the philosophical and the Gnostic – can be traced back to the end of the third/ninth century and possibly earlier.

This illustrates how varied were the sources of Shiah, more especially, Ismaili thought, and this includes those connected with the so-called introduction of philosophy. A body of fairly well developed doctrine on a range of subjects was available for use by the Ismaili *dā'īs* even in the earliest days of the movement. A philosophical or quasi-philosophical component of this also had material that shows up in such older works as Bālīnūs' *Sirr al-khalīqa*, parts of the Jābir ibn Ḥayyān corpus, and many others, in addition to both the *Theologia* and the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. Much of this was already in circulation by the time the *da'wa* emerged from obscurity in the second half of the third/ninth century. Thus the philosophical material in Ismailism need not be exclusive to a later phase.<sup>6</sup>

In looking at the Ismaili predecessors of al-Sijistānī, the present chapter seeks two sorts of specific information: first, evidence about al-Sijistānī's intellectual sources strictly within Ismailism, those who might supply an understanding of what in his teaching is original with him and what he inherited, particularly in terms of its philosophical elements; second, statements by the older Ismaili writers that explain to what degree philosophy had already become an essential component in their thinking prior to al-Sijistānī's own activity. It does not specifically analyze the origins of the more Gnostic material in early Ismailism but rather assumes that such material already existed, as the research of Stern and Halm has clearly established. A more central question in the present context concerns philosophical Ismailism and when and where it began, if that can be known on the basis of the evidence currently available.

A most useful guide in the first question about forebears ought to be al-Sijistānī's own works but they prove disappointingly uninformative. Unlike most of his Ismaili colleagues, he does not name names nor specifically credit those who went before him. In the introduction to his *al-Yanābī'*, he tenders what is for him a rare compliment to his predecessors. Concerning what he is about to discuss in that work, he says,

It is most fitting for a man of intelligence and understanding that he not engage his mind in producing the things that have already been discussed by predecessors in the books they have written. There is spiritual nourishment in the books they have composed that is sufficient beyond any need to repeat the account already given. This is especially so as the predecessors have given – may God the Most High grant them favor and exalt their memory for goodness – out of clear and lucid minds and pure souls in accordance with truthful intentions and virtuous consciences too much to permit us to soil it by adding our personal opinions to what they recorded or established. On the contrary what makes it easy for us to produce something is the abundance of their blessings and the sincerity of their intentions.<sup>7</sup>

This attitude contrasts notably with his comment, quoted at the end of the last chapter, about the weak argumentation of previous Ismaili books. Neither passage, however, refers unambiguously to the *dā'īs*, although that is surely the case. The older generations were, for him, an inspiration but reservedly so. For all the good will and pious wishes he expressed in the introduction to his *al-Yanābī'*, al-Sijistānī's low opinion of Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī, for one, is too well known to



gloss over. Not only did al-Sijistānī write a special work, *al-Nuṣra*, against Abū Ḥātim, but he quite pointedly refers to him in the *al-Yanābīʿ* as someone lacking discernment and knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Evidence from al-Bustī, in addition, casts some doubt on a commonly held notion that al-Sijistānī closely followed al-Nasafī. Al-Bustī's report, on the contrary, suggests that, while this may have been the case at the time of his writing the *Nuṣra*, there was much enmity and quarreling between their followers due to later divergencies.<sup>9</sup>

That al-Sijistānī fails to cite either the authors or the works he consulted may thus be no accident. The passage from his *al-Iftikhār*, quoted earlier, shows that he felt that many of the earlier Ismaili writers had explained doctrine poorly or perhaps improperly, as well as naively. In his mind the creed of the *Ahl al-Ḥaqāʾiq* in his time required strengthening and that al-Sijistānī saw as his principal task. This was the impetus and goal of his writing and the motivation behind the words and treatise which now exist in his name. A major question that remains concerns the extent to which he fortified Ismaili doctrine by changing or altering it, rather than merely expressing it in a more respectable form. If the older works were full of paltry stuff, was its weakness argumentation alone or the doctrine itself? To speak of *kūnī* and *qadar*, may have appeared to him far more provocative than the terms *ʿaql* (intellect) and *nafs* (soul), the latter pair being respectable members of a sturdy, well established philosophical tradition, protected by the walls of demonstrative proofs against the slings and arms of hostile argument.

Despite al-Sijistānī's own reticence about his fellow Ismaili authors, a number of them are important in assessing his place and contributions. Foremost among these are Muḥammad al-Nasafī, who is usually described in the later literature as his teacher, and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, with whom he disagreed so vehemently. Each of these writers had a place in the development of Islamic philosophy: al-Nasafī because of his highly influential book *al-Maḥṣūl*, and al-Rāzī for his long critiques of both al-Nasafī and the famous physician/philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. Unfortunately while the writings of Abū Ḥātim largely survive, the *Maḥṣūl* does not. Comparative conclusions regarding them and al-Sijistānī are not only difficult to come by but in the present state of knowledge, hazardous. To ignore the evidence concerning these two earlier authors, however, is equally troublesome and therefore it is necessary to dwell at some length on the evidence for the thought of both and of other earlier figures where possible.

The biobibliographical research of I. Poonawala and others points to the names of a number of authors and works – perhaps a dozen writers – who preceded or possibly preceded al-Sijistānī. Of these, for example, al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr, were Fatimid contemporaries of his and do not seem to have influenced him at all. Neither one was noteworthy for philosophical interests in any case. The other authors and titles recorded indicate that even more once existed, although little survives.<sup>10</sup> A principal source for this type of information is the Zaydi scholar al-Bustī, mentioned previously as providing a valuable record of the activities of the *da'wa*. He arranged his discussion of Ismaili authors by

topic and therein offers a mini-survey of Ismaili writers on the subjects he selected. Thus, for example, in his account of Ismaili doctrines about creation and the temporal generation of the world, he cites a certain Abū Ayyūb al-Farwānī (assuming this is the correct reading of al-Bustī's unpointed manuscript)<sup>11</sup> who wrote a treatise on this subject. Al-Bustī reports:

Abū Ayyūb al-Farwānī sought to prove the temporal creation of the world by means of twelve proofs all of which in fact demonstrate the pre-eternity of soul and intellect. Among these is the fact that the simple elements precede the compounded ones and thus the compounded ones are preceded beings. What is preceded is temporally created. The world itself is compounded and therefore it is also temporally created.<sup>12</sup>

Characteristically, there is no way to date this otherwise unknown figure more precisely than early to mid-fourth/tenth century which is the date of the rest of the material in al-Bustī's refutation. He does not appear in extant records of the *da'wa*. Significantly, the doctrine of intellect, soul, and his discussion of the relationship between simple being and compound being matches that of al-Sijistānī, as well as al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī, and another important figure whom al-Bustī also cites, al-Marwazī.

The Amir al-Marwazī (or al-Marwarrudhī) was, as already noted, the major supporter of the Ismaili cause in Khurasan. He was actually head of the *da'wa* in the period immediately preceding his death. Al-Bustī reports that a certain al-Marwazī (or al-Marwarrudhī) wrote a work called *Sulwat al-arwāḥ* (The Consolation of Souls).<sup>13</sup> It is tempting to identify this author with the Amir. The genre of *consolatio* was a fairly common one for philosophical writers, as for example al-Kindī's "Treatise on Tricks for Warding Off Grief" (*Risāla fī l-ḥīla li-daf' al-aḥzān*).<sup>14</sup> Al-Bustī says in this case, however, that al-Marwazī's treatise expressed the following opinion concerning the problem of the origin of mankind:

... because the circulations [of celestial motions] move around vegetative and sensate beings, [rational being] appears. These procreate, multiply, and are corrupted by death. They amalgamate in the corners of the earth to such a point that rational being is thus generated and then itself procreates and multiplies.

"This is," continues al-Bustī, "what al-Marwazī says in his book *Sulwat al-arwāḥ*. He wants to prove this by noting that we observe that if a human urinates on the feces of a mouse, a mouse generates thereby."<sup>15</sup> Al-Bustī gives here several other examples of such generations without sexual union and concludes on behalf of al-Marwazī, "The intellect does not deny that mankind comes about in this instance without being generated by a male-female pair."<sup>16</sup> The question behind this discussion is whether or not rational being or rational soul (*al-nāṭiqa*) appears out of (*zahara*) sensate being (*al-ḥissī*) due to the influence of the celestial bodies (*ajrām*) on the natures (*mufradāt*). Al-Marwazī obviously held that this is the case.

Al-Marwazī's argument, which concerns the question of the species mankind and not the individual, particular human being, indicates that his treatise was more

philosophical than its title alone would suggest. Significantly, al-Sijistānī himself takes up this same problem in the twenty-second chapter of his *al-Yanābī*, although he did not subscribe to the same doctrine about the appearance of rational beings. But about the doctrines of either al-Farwānī or al-Marwazī there is no further information, and except for titles and names there is little or nothing of importance beyond these two references. That only serves to emphasize the importance of Abū Ḥātim and al-Nasafī.

### Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī

Abū Ḥātim was certainly not a philosopher, even in a qualified sense. Nevertheless, he obviously knew a good deal about philosophy and had no reluctance in expressing his opinions on issues he understood to be philosophical. In his *al-Zīna* – that work of his which so closely resembles the *Bayān* of his own predecessor, Ghiyāth – he amassed a substantial amount of information about the lexicography of Islamic religious terms and in doing so nearly always credited a range of authorities whose statements he used. These include the major poets, traditionalists, and philologists of the centuries preceding him, among them Imru'l-Qays, Labīd, Abū 'Ubayḍa, al-Farrā', al-Aṣma'ī, Ibn Qutayba, Sībawayh, al-Kisā'ī, al-Nābigha, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, and many others. This is a non-sectarian, eclectic list to which he often adds material ascribed either to *al-Ḥukamā'* (the sages) or to *al-Ḥakīm* (the sage) or even *al-Falāsifa* (the philosophers).<sup>17</sup> For example, in reference to the philosophers, he notes their view that man is the microcosm of which the universe as a whole is the macrocosm.<sup>18</sup> He reports that the *Ḥukamā'* maintain that there are three worlds: a higher one that equals intellect; a middle that is the spheres of the heavens; and a lower that is what is beneath the sphere and is centered on the earth.<sup>19</sup> A number of other references also indicate that his citations in this work are based on philosophical sources, although which is as yet undetermined.

Abū Ḥātim's *A'lām al-nubūwa* provides a fascinating record of his controversies with Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and it, in part, contains a discussion of philosophical issues, such as those involved with the latter's theory of five eternal principles, namely God, soul, time, space, and matter.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps more importantly, one section of that book gives a fairly detailed synopsis of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*.<sup>21</sup> Abū Ḥātim obviously knew this material well. However, his attitude toward the philosophers, as expressed in his introduction to his account of their doctrines, is curious. Refusing to accept their claim that they had independently discovered knowledge of value without direct inspiration from God or the guidance of His messengers, he argues that a sure test of a philosopher's credibility is the form of his discourse. If he writes in symbols and parables and thus indicates by allusion the deep profundity under the surface of his expression, then his work is sound and in fact takes as its model the scriptures produced by the prophets.<sup>22</sup> Only three of the earlier philosophers received his approval; they are Plato, Democritus, and Proclus. He also seems to respect the writing of Bālīnūs,

at least the work with the title *Sirr al-khalīqa*, although he has grave doubt about the exact identity of the author.<sup>23</sup>

A central problem, according to him, is how to sift the words of the truthful ancient sages and philosophers from the great mass of false, misattributed, and deceptive opinions credited to them by later writers.<sup>24</sup> Abū Ḥātim despairs that philosophy is corrupt and that little or nothing is to be gained from its study precisely because it is now full of erroneous and contradictory teachings. To prove his point he summarizes the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, which is itself, of course, a collection of opinions falsely attributed to the ancient philosophers.

Abū Ḥātim's purpose for citing the material in the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, which he nowhere names, and that of the scribe or author of the work, as now known, are the same. According to both no one can trace a course through the philosophies they are about to outline without a sure guide and that would be the "Master of the Age", i.e. the imam.<sup>25</sup> Some philosophers are correct but philosophy itself does not provide a way of finding the truth among its own false ideas. Significantly, the *Pseudo-Ammonius* text seems to support Abū Ḥātim's preference for Proclus, Democritus and possibly Plato for the same reasons that Abū Ḥātim gives in their favor. He and the author of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* agree so closely that it appears they both belong to the same movement. Quite likely it is the Ismaili *da'wa* in both cases.

In terms purely of philosophical doctrine, Abū Ḥātim's third work, the *Iṣlāḥ*, documents better than the others his stand on key issues. Fortunately, it survives more or less and can be examined.<sup>26</sup> Although the acephalous manuscripts do not state which "book" (*kitāb*) he is "correcting" (*iṣlāḥ*) because the part which gave the name has been deleted by later copyists, all evidence suggests that it is al-Nasafī and his *Maḥṣūl*.<sup>27</sup> The prominence of the philosophically inclined al-Nasafī, then a proven spokesman of Ismaili thinking, prompted Abū Ḥātim to express his own reservations in regard to those matters he saw differently. The *Iṣlāḥ*, however, is overwhelmingly concerned with the history of the prophets and the ecclesiastical hierarchy surrounding them.<sup>28</sup> How they understand that history obviously affects the position of the various *dā'īs* and their continuing view of religious authority within the *da'wa*: what was true historically will be true now. Beyond this theme a relatively brief section at the beginning covers a series of more philosophical issues. Abū Ḥātim admits this by repeated references to the doctrines of the Ancients (*al-Qudamā'*) or the Sages (*al-Ḥukamā'*),<sup>29</sup> implying distinctly that these problems were originally taken up by al-Nasafī from statements in the books inherited from the Greeks.

Bearing in mind that Abū Ḥātim's pronouncements in the *Iṣlāḥ* result from what he sees as a need to "correct" the errors of al-Nasafī and therefore do not constitute an independent exposition of his own views, there are nevertheless a few significant features in the brief section in question that represent his thinking. One observation is immediately clear. Abū Ḥātim is himself a Neoplatonist as is evident by his use of such terms as *mubdi'* for God – the Originator, who transcends utterly all attributes of either the intellectual or physical world – and

his upholding the doctrine of intellect and of soul without merging the two. Curiously, on the other hand, in regard to the soul he professes a great anxiety lest this soul – that is the universal soul of the spiritual world – be taken in any sense as defective or deficient. To preserve the lofty purity of that soul and the world of which it is a part, Abū Ḥātim argues a set of principles quite at odds with those of either al-Nasafī before him or of al-Sijistānī after him. That he preferred such doctrines must, however, indicate, not only intense disagreement within the early Ismaili *da'wa* about philosophical issues,<sup>30</sup> but as well, substantial conflict amongst the Islamic Neoplatonists over matters of individual concepts. Since Abū Ḥātim's position is out of line with the Islamic Neoplatonic tradition in general, the little information about it in his *Iṣlāḥ* is even more interesting. What follows here is a summary of those individual doctrines that serve primarily to characterize the Neoplatonism of Abū Ḥātim.

According to him, God is the Originator who originates all existing beings at once. The first originated being is the sum of existing beings.<sup>31</sup> Abū Ḥātim, like his colleagues, uses the technical Arabic complex formed on the root *abda'a* as well as that based on the term *ays*. God is *mubdi'* and *mu'ayyis al-ays*. His act of originating (*al-ibdā'*) yields the first originated being (*al-mubda'*). God's originating is also called His command (*amr*) and His word (*kalima*). Once originated the originating, the command, the word and all aspects thereof are, in fact, one and the same being as first intellect.<sup>32</sup> No aspect or attribute of the originating or what is beneath it applied in any way to the Originator.<sup>33</sup> God cannot be described with any term that also pertains to created beings. Abū Ḥātim denied, in the passage where he brings this up, that God can be qualified by the term "perfection" and he employs the following formula: not that He is perfection and not that He is not perfection. This use of double negation, as will become evident in looking at al-Sijistānī's writings, is peculiar to Ismaili theory.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the foregoing material, as with much else in Abū Ḥātim's account of the cosmos and creation, accords well with both the doctrines of al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī, on the one hand, and the *Longer Theology*, on the other. An area where he stands in fairly marked contrast is his concept of time.<sup>35</sup> His notion is that time and intellect are one being. Since there is no time prior to origination and since origination and intellect are the same being, time and intellect are the same. From it – that is intellect – soul proceeds (*inba'atha*); intellect bestows (*afāda*) on soul all beingness (*aysiyyāt*) and soul receives all and also time. The procession of soul from intellect is accompanied by time. Soul's essence, nevertheless, is perfect, even though its reality requires time which causes it to accept its subservience to intellect.<sup>36</sup> Abū Ḥātim here takes great pains to reject a standard Neoplatonic idea that soul is defective. He refuses to consider the sequential mode of soul's being to be a defect. Instead he places both intellect and soul together in a higher, spiritually pure realm, uncontaminated by any portion of or contact with the physical heavens or the mundane world. Intellect and soul are alike in the sense that male and female are both one species, although the former is higher than the latter.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, they are together at the extreme of high rank and

nobility – there being no nobility above them. God has made them the source of perfect nobility, perfect light, perfect mercy, perfect knowledge, the ultimate in all ways, containing no darkness or murkiness at all. They are together the foundation of the higher, spiritual world.<sup>38</sup>

Abū Ḥātim wants to preserve the eminence of that higher world, even at the cost of weakening the connecting link between it and the lower world. To claim that soul possesses a defect or that it descends into the mundane realm of bodily being is, in his eyes, akin to the dualism of the Magians who speak about two Gods, one light and the other dark, and who maintain that the world is a mix of the two.<sup>39</sup> His fear is common in Islamic thought but runs against the Plotinian doctrine of soul which al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī accepted.

Critical for Abū Ḥātim is his notion that time proceeds out of intellect with soul. In turn soul causes the appearance of prime matter and then form. He explains that first intellect has two aspects: the essence of the originating and the essence of originated being. This duality produces two potential effects. In the soul in reality, they are motion (*ḥaraka*), which is the higher of the two and which is the active bestowing of beingness by the intellect on soul (like a pen writing on a blank tablet), and rest (*sukūn*), which is the reception of beingness in soul. In prime matter and form, they are also effects (*atharān*).<sup>40</sup> Prime matter (*hayūlā*) has three degrees: first, theoretical (*wahmīya*), which is motion and rest in the unqualified sense; second, the celestial spheres, which are generated from the previous degree; and third, the four elements (*ummahāt*), fire, air, water, and earth, which generate out of the second.<sup>41</sup> Prime matter is in time but not subsequent to time (which must mean that it is a temporal being but not temporary); form is in time and subsequent to time (temporal and temporary); and the natures (*al-afrād*) and compounds (*al-tarākib*) are in various times and seasons scattered among various temporal periods according to rank and the purpose of each.<sup>42</sup>

As prime matter and form are the foundation of the lower world, their temporal mode is not connected to the higher, spiritual world.<sup>43</sup> However, an effect (*athar*) of that world does govern this world. That effect Abū Ḥātim likens to the effect of a craftsman on his product.<sup>44</sup> He stresses that the term *ta'thīr* "to produce an effect" describes this relationship and that neither the concept of generation (*tawallud*) nor participation apply at all. The substances of this world are three only in actuality: the solid – i.e. without growth – the growing, and the sensing. There are three kinds of soul: vegetative, animal, and rational. The first substance has no soul; the second only the vegetative; the third vegetative and animal; and a fourth – the human being – possesses all three. However – and this point is vital to Abū Ḥātim – mankind is unique in having a fourth substance.<sup>45</sup> It is in fact not really of this world at all but is the effect (*athar*) of the highest world – that of intellect and soul.<sup>46</sup> Although man resembles every portion of this physical world, he is also superior to it by virtue of this sublime fourth substance.<sup>47</sup>

To call this substance a part (*juz'*) of that soul in the higher realm is a total mistake. Rational human soul does not participate in that soul nor is it generated from it. It is an effect of it only.<sup>48</sup> Nothing, no part nor substance at all of this

world, which is generated out of prime matter and form, none of what can be seen or perceived, is connected to the two roots (*aṣṭān*) – namely intellect and soul – of that world which is united with the word of the Creator.<sup>49</sup> But we accept that effect perfectly, as we were so formulated to do, since we are within its horizon.<sup>50</sup> The mundane world exists for the sake of mankind and for his acceptance of that effect. Man is the fruit of this world in its entirety. “The world and all that is in it was originated for his sake . . . and it reaches completion when its affairs come to their end. That end is when man is complete.”<sup>51</sup> His perfection is the reason for which the world was originated and it will disappear when he reaches that end.<sup>52</sup>

In the foregoing account, two points become especially significant when moving to the thought of either al-Nasafī or al-Sijistānī. One is the position of time according to Abū Ḥātim. By elevating time to the rank of intellect, he took an unusual stance that none of the rest of his Ismaili colleagues accepted. Both al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī roundly criticize him for this.<sup>53</sup>

The second point is Abū Ḥātim’s insistence that soul, although distinct from intellect, remains tightly paired with it in a lofty sublimity and does not descend into any form of corporeal being at all. This doctrine, or at least the dispute about it, is surely an echo of that of Proclus who held, in direct opposition to Plotinus, that “Every particular soul, when it descends into temporal process, descends entirely: there is not a part of it which remains above and a part which descends.”<sup>54</sup> If more were known of Abū Ḥātim’s concept of soul and the ramifications of his peculiar sense of it, or as well, of his idea of time which may also resemble the complex descriptions of time, temporal process, and timelessness given by Proclus, his position might become clear enough to allow firm conclusion about his sources. Nevertheless, his own approval of Proclus, which he admits in his *A’lām al-nubūwa*, may be a significant allegiance. It seems in any case quite likely that, even though he stands out in stark contrast to his Ismaili colleagues here, his deviations on these issues are, within the history of philosophy, neither isolated nor singularly his own.

### Muḥammad al-Nasafī

Turning now to the evidence in the case of al-Nasafī and his *Maḥṣūl*, the problems which confront this aspect of the investigation are doubly difficult because most of the direct evidence is lost. Nevertheless, it must be observed first that the *Maḥṣūl* certainly appears to have been the earliest work by an Ismaili *dā’ī* to incorporate substantial elements drawn from Greek philosophical materials. Since Abū Ḥātim died in 322/934–5, and his *Iṣlāḥ* is a refutation of the *Maḥṣūl*, there can be no doubt that the latter was composed in a prior period, perhaps as early as the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. Initially it circulated widely and fell into the hands of many scholars both inside the Ismaili movement and outside. Al-Sijistānī’s lament about unfortified books reaching the hands of enemies could well refer specifically to the *Maḥṣūl*.<sup>55</sup> Certainly it constituted a major source for the Zaydi scholar al-Bustī, who cites it frequently, more so than any other work.<sup>56</sup>

In later Ismaili literature, at least to the end of the Fatimid era, it also reappears regularly both as a positive source of doctrine and as an issue requiring rectification. Long before the twentieth century, however, it ceased to be used in the *da'wa* and it now seems irretrievably lost.

Despite this, its importance in the commencement of philosophical, Ismaili Shiism should not be underestimated. Al-Nasafī spawned several generations of supporters, among them his own sons who were, like him, important authorities for Ismaili doctrine. His relationship with al-Sijistānī, in addition, is often held to be that of master and disciple, certainly later members of the *da'wa* thought this to be the case. So crucial was his role in formulating doctrine, moreover, that other Ismaili writers, notably Abū Ḥātim, and al-Kirmānī, felt forced to take him to task by issuing specific, detailed refutations of at least part of his work, hoping thereby to substitute for it their own. All in all the information about the *Maḥṣūl*, despite its loss, exceeds that for many other Ismaili books from the same century.

Unfortunately, much of it derives from hostile sources, whether from outside, as is the situation of al-Bustī's treatise, or inside, as is true of the *Iṣlāḥ* and al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ*. What these bits of evidence divulge on the whole is that portion of al-Nasafī's thought that was rejected by his critics and enemies. It does not provide a sound guide to those doctrines that he started which continued to be accepted and used by later *dā'īs*.

Any assessment of the *Maḥṣūl*, therefore, must inevitably begin with the few statements from it that are now found in the works of his critics, principally al-Bustī, Abū Ḥātim, and al-Kirmānī. On the other side, there appears to be a high likelihood that a significant part of the *Maḥṣūl* exists in an early Ismaili work by a *dā'ī* named Abū Tammām called *Kitāb shajarat al-dīn wa burhān al-yaqīn*, which was also known as *Shajarat al-yaqīn* or simply *Shajara*.<sup>57</sup> Under the last form of the title, it was a major source for a sixth/twelfth-century Yemeni *dā'ī*, 'Alī b. al-Walīd, in his *Ḍiyā' al-albāb*.<sup>58</sup> The Syrian Ismailis also preserve it both under the second version of the title and in a recension by a sixteenth-century author, Abū Firās, in his *al-Īdāḥ*.<sup>59</sup> Thus where al-Nasafī's contribution to the *Shajara* might be identified with any certainty, a good deal could be learned about its general teachings, although this goal will not be simple, nor easily and securely reached.<sup>60</sup>

Beyond the search for material from his *Maḥṣūl* in books by other authors, there is the possibility that more of the works he wrote himself may yet exist. In the modern Ismaili libraries at least one short but interesting treatise *Kawn al-'ālam* ("The Generation of the World") has come to light.<sup>61</sup> Its attribution to al-Nasafī in the tradition is likely valid although its content is somewhat at odds with the material that purports to come from the *Maḥṣūl*.

Al-Bustī stresses over and over the precarious nature of al-Nasafī's position within the *da'wa*. This may have been due to al-Nasafī's determined use of philosophical arguments and the introduction of materials to support them from ancient sources. Or it may, in fact, reflect doctrinal differences. There was, reports al-Bustī, much quarreling and enmity between one faction and another,



particularly between al-Nasafī's group and that of al-Sijistānī. Part of al-Nasafī's problem was inconsistency. According to al-Bustī he was guilty of contradicting himself by offering one view in one place and another elsewhere.<sup>62</sup> On some issues, such as the reality of miracles, he stood by himself.<sup>63</sup> But al-Nasafī was, nevertheless, says al-Bustī, held in high regard.<sup>64</sup>

What follows here is an attempt to make sense of al-Nasafī's position on the philosophical issues without recounting each and every detail of the particular doctrines discussed by his critics.<sup>65</sup>

First and foremost al-Nasafī recognized God, the Originator, as standing totally outside His creation. His concern for the problem of defining transcendence is obvious. On this and other matters his vocabulary belongs to the standard language of the time in using the various forms of the verb *abda'a*. God is *mubdi'*, the Originator of both thing (*al-shay'*) and not-thing (*al-lāshay'*) whether these be intellectual, theoretical, cognitive, or logical.<sup>66</sup> This is to say He creates all that falls under these designations and all that does not. He is the Originator of things from nothing (*lā min shay'*), prior to which He is and nothing else exists. There is no knowledge nor form to the creation with Him before He originates His originating.<sup>67</sup> To utter these stipulations is to deny that anything, any form either simple or compound, is other than an originated being and thus is not in God's being (*huwīya*) in any sense. Non-being and nothing follow being; they are the negation of an existent.<sup>68</sup> God is the one which is not the one of the numbers because that one multiplies and He does not.

His command (*amr*), also called the word (*kalima*) and the originating (*al-ibdā'*), causes originated being, which is the intellect, to come into being. Al-Nasafī here refers to the command as an effect (*athar*) of the Creator approximately like radiance from a radiating source or like the imprinting in wax of a stamp seal.<sup>69</sup> God's power also joins and holds together opposites.<sup>70</sup>

A doctrine, clearly developed in al-Nasafī's system, that there is an intermediary between the Originator God and first originated being – that is, between the Creator and intellect – required an elaborate metaphysics to give it meaning. In effect al-Nasafī holds that there is an intermediary between the agent (*fā'il*) and the result of its act (the *maf'ūl*). He was apparently the first of the Ismailis to attempt this and his motivation stems in part from a need to assert a concept of command (*amr*) or will (*irāda*) in order to protect God's omnipotence against His immutability. Quite possibly this idea of the "word" of God (*kalimat allāh*) was already a firmly established element of Ismaili doctrine. Accordingly al-Nasafī added to it the concept of "originating" as the action of the agent which would be prior ontologically to the effect, although from the perspective of the effect the action *is* the effect. There are important statements backing this position in the *Pseudo-Ammonius* and, in al-Kirmānī's quotation from the *Maḥṣūl* which expresses this idea, the language is almost identical.<sup>71</sup> The agent (*al-mu'aththir*) produces an effect (*athar*) which becomes the patient (*al-mu'aththar*). The command, which is this effect (*athar*), has no separate being or identity other than the being it brings into being.<sup>72</sup>

This issue of mediation between God and His creation was to have a long history in Ismaili thought. Al-Sijistānī followed al-Nasafī and attempted somehow to rescue the concept, as will be seen. Al-Bustī discusses the problem at length. He says outright that there cannot be an intermediary between agent and patient.<sup>73</sup> Al-Kirmānī likewise denied it and wrote both against al-Nasafī's statement of it and al-Sijistānī's – that latter in a special treatise devoted precisely to this subject.<sup>74</sup>

The effect – that is the patient – of the command is intellect. The Creator originates the universe at once by originating intellect as one whole and seeding in it the forms of the world. Since the cause (*'illa*) of intellect is the oneness of the Creator and since that oneness is eternal, intellect is eternal like its cause.<sup>75</sup> The forms seeded in it by the oneness are, in the abstract, also eternal when in intellect.<sup>76</sup> Were this not so, al-Nasafī claims, they could not endure and accordingly there would never be a return to the source for those things which appear out of intellect. Were intellect not perfect and eternal, the order in the world would cease and it would perish.<sup>77</sup> Everything whose cause is eternal becomes, by virtue of the eternity of that cause, also eternal. Al-Nasafī's formula runs as follows: "The originating by a perfect Originator cannot be other than perfect and thus the originated being, if it is the result of perfect originating, cannot be other than perfect itself."<sup>78</sup>

Intellect, which is caused thus by the word of God, in turn emanates those forms in itself to what follows below it.<sup>79</sup> Intellect thereby becomes the intermediary between its cause and the world. Its own immediate effect is the soul. Soul, in contrast to intellect, is not perfect – it is not produced directly by the perfect originating of the Originator – and therefore requires the benefit of intellect in order to achieve this perfection at some future moment. In its agitation when soliciting those benefits, soul produces motion; in finding them it rests. As a result of these two tendencies, motion and rest generate within soul as effects of its relationship with intellect. These in turn yield *prima matter* (*hayūlā*) and form (*ṣūra*) which provide the foundation of the compound, material world.<sup>80</sup>

Exactly how soul produces the physical world must have perplexed many thinkers, and to be sure, for al-Nasafī, it was obviously a difficult and perhaps unresolved problem. According to al-Bustī, he maintained that the order of creation (or appearance; the verb he uses is *zahara*) is as follows: the command causes the intellect to appear; intellect, the soul; the soul, the celestial bodies (*ajrām*); the celestial bodies, the simple elements or natures (*mufradāt*); the simple elements, the compounded elements (*murakkabāt*); the compounded elements, the creatures with vegetative soul. These in turn produce those with animal soul; and finally the last of these causes mankind to appear. A key issue in this scheme is the relative order of the middle three, namely the celestial bodies, the simple elements, which are the qualities hot, cold, wet, and dry, and the compounded elements – also called the "mothers" (*ummahāt*), which are fire, air, water and earth. One theory is that the mixing or compounding of two "simples," as for example heat and moisture, brings about an element, for instance in this

case, air. The technical term for this in Arabic was *imtizāj*, and al-Bustī reports, not only that the Ismailis were famous for the discussions of this matter, but that al-Nasafī apparently proposed at least two different (according to al-Bustī, contradictory) solutions.<sup>81</sup> In one place al-Nasafī said that the “simples” appear out of the celestial bodies, but in another that they are the same as the celestial bodies.<sup>82</sup> The most serious question therefore must concern the nature of the celestial bodies. Al-Bustī also says that al-Nasafī argued as follows: “We describe these bodies as heat, cold, wet and dry because they cause these things as their effect not because they are themselves compounded of them.”<sup>83</sup> Is this his final word and does it resolve the issue?

Now, the reasons for such great concern about this problem are hard to see. Al-Bustī, however, says that the question of the origin of the simple elements (*al-mufradāt*) greatly disturbed the *dā'īs*. Did they come into being on their own or out of something else? It is in this context that al-Nasafī's problem with consistency must be understood. Apparently he was opposed on this issue by al-Marwazī, al-Farwānī, and al-Sijistānī (in his *al-Yanābī'*) according to al-Bustī.<sup>84</sup>

Al-Nasafī was well known for yet another theory that held that prime matter (*hayūlā*) has three degrees: theoretical (*wahmīya*)<sup>85</sup> prime matter, which is motion and rest prior to becoming the simple elements which are in turn the second degree of prime matter. The latter then produces the corporeal elements which are compounded of it.<sup>86</sup>

What is clearer in this particular complex of doctrines is the concept that mankind as a species results from an evolutionary development within the compounded, corporeal world in the following order: inert matter, that which sustains growth, that which senses and finally the combination of all three plus rationality which is the species man.<sup>87</sup> Mankind is the highest level of the physical world.

The human being, however, was the first thing formed in the soul and is the fruit of soul's endeavor to acquire the benefit of intellect.<sup>88</sup> Knowledge was originally hidden in the rational, human soul in the same way a tree is concealed in its seed. Just as the seed cannot develop without water, so the knowledge, that is, the rational and intellectual in man, will not sprout and grow without the water of prophecy.<sup>89</sup> The world was created because of man and it reaches its end when the human becomes complete.<sup>90</sup>

Al-Bustī reports that al-Nasafī attempted to prove that the soul is immaterial by an argument based on human knowledge of things not seen or otherwise sensed. The soul's ability to witness in sleep, for example, things which do not come to it through the senses proves, according to al-Nasafī, that the soul is immaterial.<sup>91</sup>

There are other details about al-Nasafī's teachings in the surviving material but much of it has less interest in terms of philosophical content. A few more points, however, are significant in part because they were matters of controversy.<sup>92</sup> Al-Nasafī resolutely maintained that human soul is a part (*juz'*) of the first substance – i.e. universal soul.<sup>93</sup> Apparently he follows in this Plotinus, more or

less. Another area of dispute was his doctrine about apostolic miracles. Al-Bustī says that all the other *dā'īs* denied miracles because, for them, the natural order cannot be interrupted as, by definition, would be necessary to produce a miracle. Unique material forms and discrete historical events cannot occur in an eternal, omniscient mind. Here this means intellect, not God. Apparently, al-Nasafī did not entirely agree that this precludes the miraculous. Some miracles, in his view, are valid in the sense that because a prophet obtains special or higher knowledge, he knows better than all other men when and how what only appears to be the law of nature will in fact be upset. His example is that someone who knows nothing of the magnetic attraction that moves iron would at first sight consider it a violation of natural order and therefore a miracle. The prophets know more about the unseen special properties of the world than any other person.<sup>94</sup> Al-Nasafī himself seems to have studied these special properties keenly, perhaps taking much of his knowledge from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's book on the subject.<sup>95</sup> Another teaching of his is that souls, when they separate from their corporeal attachments, ascend beyond the spheres and remain there as a subtle light either at an upper level in the proximity of universal soul or lower near the sphere of spheres depending on merit earned. Al-Nasafī apparently did not teach a doctrine of metempsychosis.<sup>96</sup>

This is, in brief, what al-Nasafī is known to have contributed to Ismaili doctrine in the area of philosophical speculation. There must have been a good deal more to it and possibly further research will bring this picture into better focus. For now it is relatively easy, at the least, to prove that both he and Abū Ḥātim already possessed the philosophical language and concepts which are also evident in the Arabic Neoplatonic texts such as the *Theologia* and the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. More to the point they were already arguing the details of various issues and problems within that tradition. In one way or another these writers, who both knew the material in the *Pseudo-Ammonius* intimately, reflect in their thinking only certain opinions and therefore they each represent different trends and tendencies in it. There are also parallels in this information linking them to both versions of the *Theologia*, although not perhaps explicitly. As this evidence accumulates it indicates an even more complicated history of Neoplatonic doctrine in the Islamic world that cannot be reduced to a simple picture.

### **Al-Kirmānī and the *Nuṣra***

As stated several times earlier in this study, al-Sijistānī must have entered the debates about these issues at a relatively late stage. He is clearly preceded by al-Nasafī's *Maḥṣūl* and Abū Ḥātim's *Iṣlāḥ*, because he wrote a special work, the *Nuṣra*, in defense of al-Nasafī's views against those of Abū Ḥātim. That book is also undoubtedly from a period in al-Sijistānī's career prior to the composition of the treatises for which he was best known in the later *da'wa*, such as his *al-Maqālīd* and *al-Ifṭikhār*. Since, moreover, it is now reasonably certain that the *Maḥṣūl* and the *Pseudo-Ammonius* are connected in some direct way, the latter work either pre-dates the *Maḥṣūl* (which is more likely) or it is contemporary. The

shorter *Theologia* existed in the time of al-Kindī which may put it seventy-five or more years prior to al-Sijistānī. The longer version, which contains a good deal of material that also appears in *al-Maqālīd*, probably must have been in circulation well before the main body of al-Sijistānī's writings. All this emphasizes the richness of the Neoplatonic tradition and its complexity prior to the mid-fourth/tenth century. Al-Sijistānī did not so much invent his own philosophical doctrines as he refined an already fairly elaborate understanding of an inherited movement. In one sense the most accurate assessment of him will require a far more technical investigation of these details than is currently possible. For the moment the thought of al-Sijistānī is available because his works exist in numbers and are substantially complete and intact. That he represents the culmination of as much as a century of Neoplatonic thinking in the Islamic world probably allowed him to define that tradition at its most sophisticated in terms of both expression and content. Among both the Islamic philosophers and the Ismailis, he was followed by students of al-Fārābī who largely rejected that Neoplatonic legacy. In consequence Neoplatonism weakened and faded, leaving behind the works of al-Sijistānī, which, while they represent the high point of this school, were increasingly forgotten and neglected.

This trend may be seen close up in the rather densely argued and detailed analysis offered by the Aristotelian al-Kirmānī in his *Riyāḍ*. Unlike al-Kirmānī's major philosophical work, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, which blandly recommends the works of al-Nasafī, Abū Ḥātim and al-Sijistānī as suitable precursors prior to reading it,<sup>97</sup> the *Riyāḍ* critically examines much of the debate and contention among the earlier *dā'īs*. Even in the *Rāḥat al-'aql* al-Kirmānī suggests by a curiously elliptical method that the way of his predecessors is not acceptable. Study the *Riyāḍ*, he orders his readers, and keep it constantly in mind!<sup>98</sup>

Al-Kirmānī's purpose in the *Riyāḍ* is to replace the Neoplatonism of the several older generations with doctrines that he and Ibn Sīnā, his contemporary, have taken from al-Fārābī. To undermine those who formulated an Ismaili version of Neoplatonism, he marshals the opposing opinions of its great exponents and exposes their rancorous arguments about its specific problems and failings. But in so doing it appears that he must approach this goal delicately. It is likely that al-Sijistānī, whom he would like to replace as the chief spokesman of philosophical Ismailism, was long recognized as the pre-eminent theologian of the *da'wa*. This eminence predates al-Kirmānī by several decades.

One important by-product of al-Kirmānī's *Riyāḍ* is the material it contains from al-Sijistānī's *Nuṣra* – the only such material to survive from it. Twice al-Kirmānī hints that later works of al-Sijistānī are better and once he suggests in print that copyists might have negligently transmitted the older work thereby increasing its incoherence and faultiness.<sup>99</sup> That assessment need not be taken at face value but it is hard not to draw the impression that the *Nuṣra* became obsolete and that al-Sijistānī himself preferred to restate his own position in a different way. Any revisions in his doctrine, with the exception of those implying a teaching of metempsychosis, were not radical in terms of changes as far as can be determined

from the limited evidence available but in terms of expressions. He seems certainly to be most sensitive to defects in al-Nasafī's terminology. Where the latter once admitted that God is a "perfect" Originator (*al-mubdi' al-tāmm*) and that He possesses an identity (*huwīya*), al-Sijistānī never does and even devoted a chapter of his *al-Yanābi'* specifically to denying the existence of an "identity" for God. This and other evidence strongly suggests that al-Sijistānī (as had other *dā'īs* even earlier) revised Ismaili teachings in these areas in response to criticism and debate and thereby sought continually to fortify their position with better argumentation.

Thus a general assessment of al-Sijistānī's mature views may not require careful scrutiny of his *Nuṣra*. In general, however, the main points of contention between him and Abū Ḥātim did not change at all. Al-Sijistānī, for example, held in the *Nuṣra*, and continued to hold, the soul in all forms to be imperfect and he maintains there and later that the soul in the human being is a part (*juz'*) and not a trace (*athar*) of universal soul. Much else in the disagreement of the two follows from these two premises. Neither doctrine was ever altered by al-Sijistānī. The two rather striking passages from the *Nuṣra* which follow well illustrate his point of view on these questions.

In proof of the defectiveness of soul and the completeness of intellect, many of the rational souls surrender to nature, being lead by it in whatever it commands them to do. In their inclination to its passions and pleasures, they forget the goodness of their world and its light and beauty, taking as preferable the world of nature and its designs and patterns, ceasing to remember anything of the beauty of their world and its radiant pleasures because of soul's defectiveness. Thus because soul is defective, she conceives a desire for what exists in nature in the way of passions and pleasures, shunning her world and its goodness and beauty. Intellect, because it is complete and perfect, does not forget its own world, or its goodness and beauty, nor incline to nature, or desire what it has in the way of passions and pleasures. Intellect does not regard them or if it should it does so only out of pity or compassion or contempt for them and to inform soul that what she has there is small in relation to what is in the realm of intellect. If soul were perfect like intellect, she would cleave to what she witnesses in her own world and not desire that which exists only in her effect.<sup>100</sup>

But,

If that world were radiant with no darkness in it and this world were dark with no light in it, there would be no connection between them. Instead we say that soul has two sides: one towards intellect – that one is within the horizon of intellect and is the noble and radiant side – and the other towards nature, nature being within soul's horizon. It is this latter side in which there is some darkness and murkiness because nature occurs within that horizon. Similarly we say that nature has two sides: one toward the partial soul and it is that one in which there is some light due to its falling within the limits of soul; and the other opposite the elements which is dark and murky with no light in it . . . Thus it is correct to say that prime matter was generated out of soul although it does not resemble her, just as soul was generated from the first being but does not resemble it. Darkness occurs in prime matter because of its remoteness from the first cause, due to its being generated from soul, as

similarly a defect occurs in soul to the extent of her being more removed than the first cause, that is to say intellect.<sup>101</sup>

Both of these passages were originally key portions of an attack against Abū Ḥātim, who refused to countenance a direct link between the higher, spiritual realm and this lower, material world. The human soul does not belong to that world in his view. It did not come from nor does it return there. These are important differences which require a separate and fuller examination. For now they are only examples of the hints and indications in surviving texts that reveal the rich variety of intellectual trends within the early Ismaili *da'wa*, even before the period of al-Sijistānī's most significant and enduring contributions.





## **PART II**

### **Al-Sijistānī's universe**



## Introduction: categories of thought and terms of analysis

The extant works of al-Sijistānī may be relatively few for a major author, but they nevertheless constitute a rich treasury of ideas and doctrines. In contrast to the small amount of material that survives from his predecessors, a fairly substantial output of books and treatises exists by which to judge al-Sijistānī. This body of writing has not been critically sorted or explored, and must be studied and explained before it can be adequately understood. Such problems are true of the individual treatises themselves as well as for a myriad of specific concepts they contain. Most of al-Sijistānī's ideas have until only recently constituted unexplored territory.

There are, nevertheless, at least two compelling reasons to investigate the thought and major works of al-Sijistānī. One derives from his critical role in the formation of the *da'wa* and its literature at a crucial historical period. The other grows out of his use of philosophical methods, argumentation, sources, and terms as an aid and support in the development of the doctrines of that movement. Most of al-Sijistānī's writings are outstanding examples of early philosophical Shiism. Although many members of the Ismaili *da'wa* – prior to the classical period of Imami theological scholarship – contributed to common debate about the nature of Shiism, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, attempted more than what ordinarily appears in the theological literature of other Shiite authors – and more than their predecessors Abū Ḥātim and al-Nasafī had been capable of doing. Both al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī could claim a strong base, not only in the Shiite tradition, but in philosophy as well, although both were always careful to separate the two and never allow the latter to predominate. Nonetheless, the study of a writer like al-Sijistānī is especially important, not merely for the light it casts on the history of Shiism, but equally for the information it yields about the intrusion of true philosophy on the domain of other forms of Shiite discourse. Later, other Shiite thinkers, both Ismaili and non-Ismaili,<sup>1</sup> followed the example of al-Sijistānī. In his own period, however, this was rare, even within the Ismaili *da'wa* as a whole. Thus, in his pursuit of a philosophical foundation for Shiism, he was a pioneer.

In assessing the work of either al-Sijistānī or al-Kirmānī, the two themes – religion and philosophy – must be examined side by side, according to the

perspective of the development of either Ismaili thought as a sectarian movement or of Islamic philosophy in general. The chapters which follow assume that as a principal purpose, although by focusing on al-Sijistānī to the exclusion of al-Kirmānī, they cover in the present instance only one of these critically important authors.<sup>2</sup>

Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī is in general one of the least studied and least recognized of the many major scholarly figures of the Islamic world from the fourth/tenth century because he was an Ismaili *dā'ī* and, therefore, a partisan of a radical departure in Islam and because his works have so long remained inaccessible. However the books that al-Sijistānī wrote are now available for the most part and the content of both his Ismailism and his philosophical interests is much less obscure than it once was. By delving carefully into the surviving examples of his thinking, as he himself expressed it in his own writings, it is possible to come face to face with his own version of Ismailism and to understand much of what concerned him both as a person and as a defender and propagator of that form of Shiism.

In his personal intellectual preoccupations, his attachment to Neoplatonism is curious and it gives the particular mixture of his ideas a special significance. In choosing Neoplatonism out of the various types or schools of philosophy then available to him, he took a rather unusual step. But because he did adhere to that form of philosophy, rather than, say, the ideas of Aristotle, he assumed a special place within the history of Islamic philosophy which is of interest for this reason alone.

For al-Sijistānī Neoplatonism and philosophy in general were tools for explaining the universe; they did not constitute an end in themselves, but rather were a means of comprehension and understanding. Al-Sijistānī did not practice philosophy, at least not overtly, although he certainly did borrow widely from it. For all the debt he owes to his Greek predecessors, it is his Islamic prophet, *waṣī*, and imam whose authority he accepts. He is a Muslim, Shiite, Ismaili, first and foremost, although fully aware of the value of philosophical and scientific thought and how to acquire and employ it when and where desirable. The sources of al-Sijistānī's ideas, consequently, preserve a basic duality and, although much of what he wrote is an attempt to amalgamate and merge them together, neither one totally loses its separate identity. He himself both recognizes and readily admits that the two come from different traditions.

There are other elements in al-Sijistānī's thought that are not easily classified. One form of reasoning, for example, that often appears in his writings and characterizes a certain part of his methodology, but not that of the Philosophers or traditional Islamic dialectical theologians, is a standard feature of Ismaili literature. This is a driving need, not merely to prove points philosophically or to dispute issues dialectically, but to trace constructively those harmonies and analogies in the cosmic structure that envelop all things in one grand display of God's perfect wisdom. For al-Sijistānī, everything fits into a scheme and the mystery of its meaning can be extracted only by studying the parallels between the

disparate parts of that scheme. Perhaps no other theme is as important or as basic to al-Sijistānī and the Ismaili writers. All things have a natural place, a rank, a position and a value. To explain some thing is not merely to define it but also to uncover and reveal its exact position in the many networks of which it is a part or into which it fits. The full complexity of anything is known only when all its relationships are manifest, whether they belong to its physical situation, or its spiritual condition, or some correspondence between these two. The universe cannot endure, in whole or in part, except by virtue of the structure that ties everything together. Cosmology, for al-Sijistānī, is analogy; analysis proceeds by finding the inherent analogy between one structural element or set of elements and another.<sup>3</sup>

For reasons such as these, there will always remain an air of uncertainty and ambiguity in the study of a thinker like al-Sijistānī and to the reading of his kind of literature. But it is worth pointing out that these complex problems involve the personal causes, loyalties, and the service of the thinker in question and they thereby create a dimension to the investigation of them that is less abstract and rarefied than for many other Islamic philosophers. Al-Sijistānī was both a partisan *and* a philosopher; his message was at once theoretical and practical; and his ideological program envisioned not only an intellectual goal but a social one as well.

In the absence of previous studies, al-Sijistānī's writings could be looked at in several ways, any of which ought to prove fruitful. In this portion of this study they are regarded as a whole. Where they, in themselves, give no direct hint of the context from which they speak, it is important to impose on them controls. These provide a general focus by which to make sense of these writings in a broader context, although such a context may not have been germane to them originally. Al-Sijistānī was a partisan philosopher writing a form of theological literature in an age and time now lost. If he had been followed by a long chain of students and commentators, this might not be so, but that did not happen. The original circumstances of his words, therefore, cannot be fully recovered in many details. Nevertheless, they retain much of their value and there are ways to elucidate, or to help elucidate, the meaning in them.

The main intellectual corpus that now indicates the thought and doctrine of al-Sijistānī is consistent throughout in a way that forcefully establishes the surviving books and treatises to be the work of a single mind but yet is also diffuse and disordered, with no obvious focus or arrangement of the whole. Still, because there is a fair amount of overlapping between one treatise and another, many ideas and phrases repeat themselves and therefore provide clues to which of the specific doctrines predominate and persist. But it is hard, nonetheless, to find a universal framework for these individual ideas, in part, because al-Sijistānī himself does not explain the larger context in which he operated as a thinker. Much of what he says presumes a substantial background. His attitude is remarkably explicit: what he writes, he admits, is for those well accustomed to learning and "the axioms of demonstrative reasoning."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, now,

without access to that learning – at least not as al-Sijistānī knew it – it is possible only to hint at the broad trends into which his concepts fit. Nevertheless, there is some relatively sound evidence for many details and works such as his *al-Maqālīd* and *al-Yanābī'* provide a few principles of organization which thereby signify the likely road to follow in analyzing and presenting his teachings.

In characterizing his works, it seems reasonable to speak of the teachings of al-Sijistānī. Certainly, one principal element in what he wrote involves an acceptance of Ismaili doctrine as already taught in the *da'wa* before his time. But it is not merely that. His own involvement is often clear enough and his own thinking therefore intrudes and stamps his writings with a characteristic personality. One essential ingredient of this owes its existence to philosophy, and thus referring to his teaching as a philosophy would not be out of place. The author of the works from which these doctrines come, however, is fiercely certain of only one class of facts – those that constitute the principles of religious knowledge. He is less adamant about the elements of scientific or philosophical issues and consequently often attempts in these matters to argue a proof (sometimes several such proofs, one after the other). Nonetheless, on balance it is frequently difficult to separate dogma from philosophy, if in fact these are proper terms for two opposing components in al-Sijistānī's pronouncements. The tension between philosophy and religion is a natural, not an alien, relationship. It contributes a useful tautness and force to his writings; they are not easy nor comfortable, but the problems they examine explore fundamental questions – questions that arise out of the basic intellectual requirements of thinking human beings.

In organizing the specific themes of his inquiries, al-Sijistānī always begins with issues connected to the realization of what God is and is not, and with fixing Him as the focus of orientation and worship, though not as the subject of what is ordinarily classified as theology. There is no theology for al-Sijistānī because created beings cannot know God in any way and therefore cannot really speak about Him at all. Nevertheless, in asserting even this basic point and in arguing his negation of all positive theologies, al-Sijistānī consumed many pages, some of which constituted his finest, and perhaps most creative, contributions.

Following a discussion of God's absolute, unqualified transcendence and the implications in holding to this doctrine in a most pure and rigorous fashion, the flow of al-Sijistānī's ideas characteristically moves down a hierarchical chain from the simple and universal to the complex and particular. This is the process both in al-Sijistānī's own method of investigation and exposition and in the very unraveling of the creation of the cosmos. Unlike most of his ancient Greek sources, the metaphysics of a Muslim (as with Jews and Christians) requires a careful delineation of the way God created. It necessitates finding a point or points along the nexus between the divine origin of all things and the things themselves that could be clearly shown to establish a division separating God from the world. Few problems are as fraught with philosophical difficulty and doctrinal pitfalls. More so in that for al-Sijistānī the answer also included a complicated series

of mediating principles or hypostatic beings who function as the elements of transition from one extreme to the other.

From this it is easy then to understand not only why creation is, for al-Sijistānī, such a complex matter, but also why it forms the major axis along which his philosophical activity extends. In this he resembles a great many other Neoplatonists for whom the general scope of their thought follows a double path. One leads downward from God or the One to the ordinary, mundane world of physical and material reality. The lower portions exist in constant flux; the higher remain in perpetual stability. The process in reverse sees the rise upward of the human soul, once purified of its entanglement with the body. This is its salvation and its passage to eventual eternity.<sup>5</sup>

In following these two paths, downward and upward, al-Sijistānī adheres with surprising consistency to both his Ismaili heritage and to the classical Neoplatonic tradition. Typically the process is as follows. Foremost among created beings is intellect. It is the first to have existence and is the nearest to God Himself. Next comes soul, followed by nature, which is actually only a lower form of soul. Beyond nature a shift occurs from the sublime and spiritual to the mundane and corporeal. Nature in turn generates the physical world in which the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth combine to make the earthly habitat of man and the plants and animals.

In this terrestrial habitat the history of mankind commences and the upward way begins. For the Ismailis this is distinctly an historical process involving the collective salvation of mankind and it depends on the existence of a second hierarchy – one that reveals the path along which God guides those who seek the truth out of this transitory, terrestrial prison into the abode of permanent and eternal reward. This latter hierarchy consists of the speaking, lawgiving prophets, the executors of their legacies, and the imams and others who preserve the truths they convey. Finally, at the ultimate end of the temporal order, one final messenger, the Messiah, will usher in the day of triumph, the moment of resurrection and judgment, and the beginning of paradise. This paradise, being eternal and everlasting, is accordingly a part of the sublime world of the higher beings. It cannot and does not possess either physical or sensate qualities or such pleasures as depend on these. The path upward leads back through the same higher beings in the direction of God or the One as encountered in reverse on the path downward.

This outline helps provide a context for the individual concerns of a writer like al-Sijistānī, who rarely, if ever, explains by himself what holds together the disparate chapters of his books or why his thoughts move from one specific proposition to another. It is, therefore, the guiding compass for the study in Part II, each portion of which is confined to one of al-Sijistānī's principal themes along the downward and upward path. Thus, although the choices involved in grouping his material into the topics that constitute these chapters is, in part, arbitrary, there is nonetheless a certain justification for them in the progression within al-Sijistānī's own method of exposition.

## A theology of unqualified transcendence

No area of doctrine seems to have captured al-Sijistānī's attention and creativity like that surrounding the problem of defining *tawhīd*.<sup>1</sup> This particular concern for a pure expression of God's absolute transcendence is itself surely almost a universal feature of Islamic theologies. Thus, it is not at all strange that al-Sijistānī sees this as the most significant new teaching of Muḥammad and that the greatest advance brought to mankind by this prophet is exactly the refinement he contributed to the understanding of God's unique oneness. If there were no other purpose in the prophet mission of Muḥammad, his formulation of Islam's monotheistic credal statement "There is no god but God" would alone constitute an adequate and sufficient reason to follow him over the great lawgiving prophets of the prior eras.<sup>2</sup>

This was equally a field of philosophical speculation, even for the ancient Greeks, for whom, or at least for some of whom, the origin of all things had to be absolutely one – a one in which there exists no multiplicity in any sense. In Plato the ultimate principle is the One or the Good and it is beyond being. As in Plotinus later it transcends being by also transcending non-being. It is not non-being, which would be expressed in Greek *an-ousion*, but *hyper-ousion*, above being altogether. The One refuses all predication.

What exists in Greek philosophy, however, relative to a divine source is mitigated by whole elements in the One of pantheistic activity that embrace in one degree or another the lower levels of reality. God does not stand alone and in isolation from the world or worlds He creates, but is rather the foremost principle of divinity in a world which itself participates in that divinity. There is no sharp dividing line between God and His product, between the cause and the effect, between the divine, eternal ruler and his transitory and ephemeral subjects. Judaism, Christianity and Islam might appreciate the theological orientation of Plato and Plotinus, but they required more. There were profound adjustments without which few believers in Semitic revealed religion with its deeply ingrained creationist mythos would have been able to contemplate a marriage of religion and philosophy. God, the Creator, could not simply become a Principle of the origin of being or the ultimate ground of existence. It is not enough that God transcend being, He must create it as well, and He cannot do this latter act by in



any way becoming immanent in what results from this deed. God must remain untainted by the being that comes to exist; He is not merged in the world He has made.

This is no easy problem as even the most confident of theoreticians, like al-Sijistānī, would readily admit. Already by his time, there had been a long history of Islamic debate about many of the issues involved. What, in turn, Muslim theologians knew of Jewish and Christian discussions of the same issues is hard to determine; few records survive about the doctrines of earlier religions concerning this particular matter in Islamic sources. It is clear, regardless, that Islamic controversies were serious to the point of ideological brutality and violence on exactly certain of the points argued in questioning how to state or insure the absolute oneness of God. Which characteristics applied to Him, such as calling Him “creator” or “beneficent” or “all-seeing” or “all-knowing,” might compromise the strict ideal of *tawḥīd*? The Muʿtazila had tried to answer these questions but had only modest success in making themselves understood in any but the most limited circles. And in any case their solution, which accepted certain essential attributes of God while removing all others, was not acceptable to either those literalists who were against all compromise or an even smaller number of those who inherited this problem but who refused steadfastly to recognize any concept at variance with what they felt is pure and unblemished *tawḥīd*.

It is well to approach al-Sijistānī’s understanding of God from this angle rather than from philosophy alone. Because so much of his language in dealing with this problem derives from the Arabic Neoplatonic materials, it is easy to forget that his primary concern is *tawḥīd* – that is, purifying the formula in which and through which God’s totally unique status is declared free of the contamination of human physical and mental impediments. This is an act of worship, not of investigation or exploration. Its metaphysics is not to prove that God exists, but to remove Him absolutely from the cosmos and everything in it. The worshipper must come to appreciate the awesome, ineffable and unknowable God, whose status puts Him beyond intelligibility.

This task could not be undertaken, however, simply on the basis of Quranic vocabulary and reasoning which is far too fluid and inexact, and even too uncertain, for the controlled explanations required in pursuit of al-Sijistānī’s rigorously precise goal. While it is a religious problem because it is fundamental to what al-Sijistānī and the Ismailis considered true Islam, it cannot and could not reach the level of sophistication it did without recourse to the use of philosophical discourse.

Still, conceding the role of Neoplatonic thought in providing a framework within which al-Sijistānī sought his concept of absolute monotheism and the formula by which he gave it credal standing, it is important to note even at the outset that there are at least two fundamental differences between him and this particular source of his thought. Plotinus, through the textual survival of his *Enneads* in Arabic, gave the Islamic world, not only his version of the doctrine of

the hypostatic One, but also the concept of a driving force that calls the individual soul to seek it out and to rise toward a union with it. Poetic and passionate, his description of the One and of the individual soul's confrontation with it, is lyrical, mystical and intensely personal. Such phrases as,

I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine place. And there I see such light and splendor as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend . . . the place of splendor and light, which is the cause of all light and splendor.<sup>3</sup>

Plotinus' language – more especially that of his Arabic translator – is full of not merely reverence and awe but of love as well. The object of this desire is the One and the meeting between individual soul and It is ecstatic and not rational, giving way thereby ultimately to mysticism. What makes al-Sijistānī different is just this: his path to the One is not so much personal as institutional. It is, in his terms, a matter built into the ecclesiastical order (the *'ālam al-waḍ'*). Such knowledge as this is not mystical but rather prophetic and that is the basis of the message to which the *da'wa* summons. Even intellect, the first created being, neither knows nor experiences what gave it existence.

Another difference offers greater paradox. Having gone to the utmost length in fashioning a doctrine of transcendence, free of any associating principles on the part of the created universe, al-Sijistānī, and those like him, appear to cancel all this by insisting that God acts by will and not by necessity. The complications in this notion are many and they must be discussed in detail in what follows here and in the next chapter on creation. For now, it is important to see that the baggage al-Sijistānī carries includes more than is explained by his adherence to Neoplatonism or to a received body of Mu'tazilite theological theory and this is particularly noteworthy even in this highly sensitive issue.

Out of an Islamic concern to avoid the sin of *shirk*, that is, of compromising God by associating Him with something else, al-Sijistānī's exposition of the monotheistic dilemma nearly always begins with an investigation of why and in what ways others fail. What kinds of impurity do other notions of *tawḥīd* contain? The two general directions taken by other Muslims that he rejects are *tashbīh* – attempting to understand God by analogy and comparison (especially with a human quality) – and *ta'ṭīl* – denuding the concept of God to the point that it has no content and is therefore unsatisfactory for religious consciousness. The former is most often a form of anthropomorphism and was obviously the more easily appreciated of these two erroneous approaches. *Ta'ṭīl* is a reaction against *tashbīh* and its use as a method of purifying *tawḥīd* was widespread. Likewise the charge of having carried it to the point of atheism or agnosticism was common in the exchanges between various theological factions.

Among those al-Sijistānī sees as proposing some form or other of *tashbīh*, he included the following classes: those who attributed to God a *jism maḥdūd* (a finite body); those who said God is a *shay' mawsūm* (a classifiable thing); and those who maintained that God is a *jawhar manṣūb* (an attached or related substance). These three groups are the Sunni traditionists, the scholastic

theologians (*mutakallimūn*), and the Philosophers respectively. All are wrong, according to al-Sijistānī, because all limit the absolute nature of God.<sup>4</sup>

Using another frame of reference he finds that there are four kinds of worshippers: idol worshippers, anthropomorphists, the *Ahl al-ʿAdl*, and the *Ahl al-Ḥaqāʾiq*. The first group is too obviously mistaken in their doctrines for there to be any real discussion about them. The second include those who commit *tashbīh*; most probably here he means those who accept the imagery of Quranic descriptions of God in the most literal way possible. Such people cling to the outward sense of scripture which is the sense most obvious to the uninformed and unlearned. The third are of more interest and here al-Sijistānī is specific. They include the Muʿtazila, the Khawārij and the Rawāfiḍ (Imami Shiah).<sup>5</sup> These seem to lie behind a reference of his in another place to "... a group of ancients and a collection of sects in Islam, who maintain that God is indescribable, indefinable, uncharacterizable, unseeable, and not in a place."<sup>6</sup>

This last group offers the position from which al-Sijistānī departs in his own effort to devise a more truthful doctrine. These people, he says, "... reckon that this evaluation constitutes the glorification of God and an exaltation of Him and that they are thereby free of *shirk* and *tashbīh*." But in fact according to al-Sijistānī, "They do not worship God with the correct worship due Him and they are not cognizant of Him in the proper way."<sup>7</sup>

The position of these people is what is known in classical theology as the *via negativa*. For them God can only be understood by explaining what He is not. Elements of this kind of reasoning exist in most Neoplatonism and in the formal theologies derived from it.<sup>8</sup> It also is a feature of many Islamic discussions of the subject as al-Sijistānī rightly claims. For al-Kindī it is a major area in which philosophy justifiably supports a religious doctrine. This is clear in his treatise *On First Philosophy*, which includes a lengthy proof of God based on the negative arguments that al-Sijistānī is here objecting to.<sup>9</sup> His own answer is that of the *Ahl al-Ḥaqāʾiq*, the People of Truths, who alone, in his words, "obey the established guides . . . and draw near to God through obedience to the bearers of religious knowledge in which they are firmly grounded." The emphasis on following the true guides – those who are *rāsikhūn fī al-ʿilm* – is characteristically Shiite and it means in this instance that proper knowledge of correct worship is obtainable exclusively from the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the prophet, the *waṣī*, and the imams or others of lesser rank in the *daʿwa*.

Al-Sijistānī's procedure in general is to attack the method of negative theology as itself constituting a form of anthropomorphism although not an obvious one.

Whoever worships God by denying the attributes falls into a hidden anthropomorphism, just as someone who worships Him by affirming them falls into obvious anthropomorphism.<sup>10</sup>

It should be clear at this point that the doctrine of the Neoplatonists is a sophisticated form of negative reasoning. The difficulty of knowing the unknowable was, in fact, more of a puzzle to Plotinus than it is for al-Sijistānī.

"Whoever wishes to describe the Almighty Creator must remove from Him all attributes . . .," is but one example of such statements from the Arabic Plotinus material.<sup>11</sup> For Plotinus the paradox of trying to comprehend the very source of all things is a process which becomes mystical and ineffable only at its ultimate end. For al-Sijistānī, by contrast, God is a given that cannot be attained in any sense whatsoever. Therefore, all men can do is to rely on the testimony of those chosen few who have received the truth about Him by means of revelation.

The Ismaili authors offered, accordingly, no new method for knowing the unknowable God, nor for that matter for proving His existence. Their primary concern was with purifying Islamic worship and thereby establishing in the minds of the believers a correct appreciation of the various levels of reality that form the ranks of the hierarchy between an individual Muslim and the One, True God.

In dealing with the ultimate upper limit of this chain of being, however, al-Sijistānī, like those he criticizes, must still pursue a line of rigorous denials that aim at stripping the concept of God of all intellectual perception. This goal he pursues most completely in the *Maqālīd*, but it is reflected accurately in parts of his *al-Yanābī'*, *al-Iftikhār*, and especially the *Kashf al-mahjūb*, which commences with a whole section (*maqālāt*) on *tawhīd*. In all of this material, al-Sijistānī threads his way carefully through a considerable number of complex issues, all of which involve both technical and non-technical language. To be sure he must retain the names and terms that denote God in the holy scripture. However, the exact terminology of this kind of theology requires something closer to the precision of scientific and philosophical usage. Perhaps the single most important word in discourse of this latter type is *Mubdi'* from the Arabic root *abda'a*. It indicates the relationship implied in the act of *ibdā'* or origination – a unique act which belongs entirely to God alone. It has absolutely no parallel.

This is, of course, a species of creation and as such it appears again more fully in that role in the next chapter on that subject. Here it is important to see how al-Sijistānī and his Ismaili predecessors find a technical term for God merely by extracting the active participle from a verb which describes an action. What he seeks is neutral language that conveys no meaning in addition to its minimal position in a tightly controlled set of special functions.

Language, therefore, is a major feature of this form of analysis. In much of what he writes, al-Sijistānī attempted to deny his opponents the words and terms they might have chosen in constructing their own theologies. God can be said, for example, to have *qudra* (power) but not *qūwa* (force). This means that God has the absolute power to create the universe from nothing but not that He possesses a force that operates on, in, or by virtue of something else.<sup>12</sup> God's true being, His *innīya*, is utterly beyond reason and therefore is unknowable. What is attainable is an *innīya* that belongs to intellect even though it points out the direction of God, and therefore intellect recognizes the being of God through concepts such as His command and His goodness which are, in fact, nothing more than a part of intellect in so far as they are known as all.<sup>13</sup> God's uniqueness, His *fardāniya*, is pure and absolute. He transcends all number and numbering; He alone is

unmultipliable unity.<sup>14</sup> He cannot be said to be a cause (*'illa*)<sup>15</sup> or a substance (*jawhar*)<sup>16</sup> and He is not a thing (*shay'*).<sup>17</sup> In each case the terms he rejects were those employed by one or more of his antagonists.

Like the term *innīya*, *huwīya* means "being" and can be used to denote the being of God. Earlier writers and texts, including al-Nasafī and the *Theologia*, employ it in this way. Al-Sijistānī, however, carefully rejects it as he did *innīya* whenever applied to God.<sup>18</sup>

Another good example is the word *shay'*. Many reputable theologians would not call God simply a thing but some approved a special formula which runs as follows: "God is a thing not like other things" (*Allāhu shay' un lā ka' l-ashyā'*). Al-Sijistānī retorts: what meaning is there in this and how does it recognize God as a unique transcendent being? The sun is a thing unlike any other thing! In fact, he continues, this characterization holds validity only for intellect which does contain the thingness of all things. In taking this position al-Sijistānī refutes the doctrine of many of the scholastic theologians such as, for example, al-Māturīdī or Ibn Bābūya, to name but two.<sup>19</sup>

His rejection of the notions that God is a cause (*'illa*) or that He is a substance (*jawhar*) are equally significant. This is the position of the Philosophers, a point about which al-Sijistānī is explicit. It is on this issue more than any other that he separated himself from them philosophically. In the relatively brief discussion of *tawḥīd* in his *al-Iftikhār*, he takes an especially polemical stance against them and cites there two chapters of *al-Maqalid*. These contain, he says, more detail in support of his contention that God is not a "cause" nor a "substance."<sup>20</sup> In his *Sullam al-najāt* he repeated his reference to the *Maqalid* in this same context.<sup>21</sup>

The philosophy he rejects in this matter is not just that of the Aristotelians but of the Neoplatonists as well. The *Theologia* consistently speaks of God as the ultimate cause of things or the cause of causes. For Plotinus it is fundamental that the cause is superior ontologically to its effect and therefore is preserved from a necessary relationship with it, but this is not sufficient for al-Sijistānī in his quest for the purity of *tawḥīd*.<sup>22</sup>

There is another key term: *tanzīh* or transcendence. Al-Sijistānī well understood that the secret to the accuracy of *tawḥīd* is the discovery of an air-tight expression of God's absolute transcendence. Never mind for the moment either of the two problems, noted earlier, about how to know the Transcendent Being and how to allow Him free will in making His creation. The dilemma here is transcendence – a matter that obviously begins, for al-Sijistānī, where the Mu'tazilites failed. Their attempt to delineate what God is and is not remains, in his mind, a human exploration of the realm beyond reason and thus falsely provides rules for an area in which no rules operate. God is not reason and thus is not reasonable. Because He is not subject to reason, He is not obtainable by speech either. The God of al-Sijistānī must be beyond all human activity of any kind. While negation and de-anthropomorphism – that is, denying *tashbīh* – do, in fact, remove God from the corruption of the positive concepts of Him in traditional theologies, they result nevertheless in a notion which is itself a human conceit.

The effort to deny God all human attributes and not to describe Him in human terms fails because although the God that remains is not physically human, He is still intellectually human.

Surely this is a fair assessment. Plotinus' One, despite his considerable attempts to make It transcend intelligible reality, is perceptible to intellect as logically it has to be in order to have meaning. For al-Sijistānī, however, this constitutes a "hidden anthropomorphism" (*tashbīh khafīy*).<sup>23</sup> He, unlike Plotinus, approaches this problem with the issue of *tawhīd* uppermost. Pursuit of *tawhīd* by negation is itself an intellectual enterprise designed to satisfy a human aspiration. His God is beyond even this.

Al-Sijistānī's solution is the following: the complete process of verifying God's absolute transcendence and of coming to a correct cognizance of Him and His position must consist of two steps. First, there must be a full and rigorous denial of all *tashbīh*, including the negation of all physical and intellectual attributes. One must specify that God is not a thing, not limited, not describable, not in a place, not in time, not a being, and so on. But al-Sijistānī has no fear of this leading to a *ta'īl*, because this is a first step only. It requires a second which is to repeat each of these negations and at the same time to negate the negation. God is *not* not a thing, *not* not limited, *not* not describable, *not* not in a place, *not* not in time, and *not* not a being. The second set of negations denies the first although both are required. It is not possible to use the second set only.<sup>24</sup>

This method of two-fold negation is, according to al-Sijistānī, the only way to answer the charge of committing *ta'īl* and at the same time to obtain a perfect form of *tawhīd*. This formula prevents theologians from saying or teaching anything unauthorized about God – either positive or negative. Of it he declares,

There does not exist a *tanzīh* more brilliant and more splendid than that by which we establish the absolute transcendence of our Originator through the use of these phrases in which a negative and a negative of a negative apply to the thing denied.<sup>25</sup>

It is a formula he employs with great pride in various ways in many places. For example in his writings the standard Islamic invocation of *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* ("Thanks be to God") may appear as *al-ḥamdu li-llāh al-ma'būd bi-lā wa lā lā* ("Thanks be to God who is worshipped by 'no' and 'no no' [or 'not not']").<sup>26</sup>

While it is hard to prove that al-Sijistānī invented this device since he apparently made no such claim, it is true that no other source for it has been claimed. It did become a standard feature of Ismaili doctrine, recognized as such by the highly critical al-Kirmānī, for example, and it does not exist in exactly this form in what survives of earlier Ismaili literature. Most importantly the evidence for the doctrine of al-Nasafī, outlined earlier from the detail supplied by al-Kirmānī in the final chapter of his *Riyāḍ*, does not show any obvious sign of it. Abū Ḥātim, like al-Sijistānī, displays an interest in negative theology and even in trying to express some form of doubled negation but seems not to have moved as far along this road. Therefore whatever remote origin it may have, al-Sijistānī is the first to explain and thus to propagate such a teaching in exactly this manner.

And, it should be added, to defend it. Although its author can justifiably boast of having achieved a unique method of expressing *tawḥīd*, it is not immediately clear that it avoids all of those very sins he credits to his enemies. He admits himself that an opponent might argue, for example, that the statements “God is not describable” and “God is *not* not describable” are mutually contradictory. If one is true, the other must be false.<sup>27</sup> According to al-Sijistānī, however, these paired assertions are not contradictory because they are both species of the negative. The first strips the concept of God of association with the physical and the second removes from Him all affiliation to the spiritual or intellectual. God is thus understood as belonging neither to the sensible nor to the intelligible realm. The negation of negation is, for him, the absolute disassociation of God from intelligibility. God cannot be A and God cannot be [not A] – the item [not A] being an intelligible idea despite its questionable ontological status.<sup>28</sup>

But what then of the question of whether God is truly affirmed and certain, if *tawḥīd* removes Him from all connection to the created universe. What certifies God if everything is denied? This is a difficult problem for al-Sijistānī and, like that previously mentioned, he both stated and attempted to refute it, showing in all probability that some opponent did in fact actually voice such an objection.<sup>29</sup>

A constant theme in al-Sijistānī’s writing speaks of how God, the Originator, is always both denied and affirmed (using the verbs *nafā* and *thabata* and their derivatives). In some fairly Neoplatonic language, he talks about how intellect seeks to comprehend its origin but cannot. One half of this activity on the part of intellect consists in affirming the existence of that origin but the other half is a denial based on seeing that it has no ability to so affirm.<sup>30</sup> Intellect cannot prove that God exists. Nevertheless, al-Sijistānī claims that God is “more certain than all things certain” (*athbatu min kulli thābitin*).

The recalcitrant suppose that what has no definition and what has *not* no definition is not a thing with certainty since there is nothing certain about it in any way. It needs to be explained to them that the Truly Certain is what has no definition and has *not* no definition.<sup>31</sup>

His point is that the defined and the undefined are a pair that require another outside these two as the determinant which separates them. Something which possesses an opposite, as in this case the defined and not defined, has the weakness of having duality. God has no duality nor is there duality in His power, which transcends both definition and no definition. He is the Certain which is more certain than any certainty. All other certainty is figurative or derivative and hence not truly certain.

Before analyzing the success and failure of al-Sijistānī’s formulation of *tawḥīd*, it is worthwhile commenting that, although his language is not that of Ibn Sīnā, the argument just given, as well as others employed by him concerning God, rely to a great extent on the contingency proof that came to be the cornerstone of the latter’s metaphysics. Al-Sijistānī curiously does not speak about *wājib al-wujūd* and *mumkin al-wujūd* by explicitly using these two terms for what has necessary

existence and what has possible or contingent existence, although they do appear in one section of the *Longer Theologia*.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless the contingent nature of all originated being is implicit in al-Sijistānī's thinking, as is well illustrated here in his discussion of certainty.

If, as stated above, al-Sijistānī allows no method for knowing the God he perceives to be utterly beyond reason and intelligibility, it would be expected that he offers no encouragement to mystics because he rejects any claim that the individual can attain special access to this ultimate reality. And none seems to exist in any of the early Ismaili material. Rather than yield to a Sufi mysticism on this issue, they remain fully committed to rationalism. God is not merely difficult to know; He is truly unknowable.

But how then could al-Sijistānī continue to confess a doctrine of God which closely adheres to that of the *Qur'ān* itself? This is possible for two reasons. If God is ultimately unknowable by individual men, He is nonetheless active in the world through those few chosen souls who receive His special inspiration and revelation. They alone convey what information there is about God and are charged with the responsibility of maintaining and spreading this information in a pure and pristine fashion. Scripture is one form this information takes; its orally taught and transmitted interpretation is another. Ismaili, Shiah Muslims know about God and worship Him correctly because they follow and obey God's appointed and inspired messengers and delegates on earth. This attitude, secondly, implies that all scripture has two aspects: an outward and an inner. Each time al-Sijistānī uses a Quranic term for God, such as *khāliq* or *bārī*', it has two senses, one figurative and the other real. The latter corresponds to the true, unknowable-ness of God and points in the direction of the abstract, unqualified transcendence which is actually true of Him.<sup>33</sup>

Did al-Sijistānī succeed in finding a pure expression of *tawḥīd* as he claims? Leaving aside the religious question, there continue to be interesting philosophical problems. Does the formula of the two-fold negation actually mean anything? If so what is it? In one sense it deliberately commits *ta'ṭīl* and then denies that this is *ta'ṭīl* simply by stating that this is *not* what it is. There is no God and there is *not* no God. Yet al-Sijistānī appears to imply something much more than this simple reduction of his argument. To do him total justice it is necessary to move on to an enlargement of the issue by taking up his concept of creation itself, first, and then of the created beings, second. Only within this greater perspective does the extent of the problem of God reach its full complexity. Al-Sijistānī's theology of unqualified or absolute transcendence has a number of ramifications connected with these other subjects. One result of the original paradox in his pursuit of a doctrine that eliminates reason from theology is a concomitant difficulty of asserting the rationality of everything else.



## Creation as command

Having chosen a concept of *tawḥīd* that emphasizes the absolute nature of God's transcendence against any taint of immanence, al-Sijistānī turns to a second major area of controversy – that of creation.<sup>1</sup> In one sense the problem of creation is itself a part of a doctrine of God, given that the solutions which were proposed in Greek philosophy had become unacceptable in creationist religion. The Greek notion that the cosmos is composed of two realms – the sensible and the intelligible – and that the subject of creation is merely what connects the one with the other fails to offer a place for a Creator God who stands totally outside the product of His creative activity. Where al-Sijistānī found an understanding of *tawḥīd*, in part based on a Neoplatonic God beyond being and knowability, his doctrine of creation must yet bring that God back into a correct, productive relationship with the universe He oversees. To do so al-Sijistānī must reintroduce ideas that largely, though perhaps not entirely, mitigate his advantage in the area of *tawḥīd*.

The philosophical division of reality into sensible and intelligible makes of the latter a world of permanence, purity and simplicity and of the former a realm of transition, corruption, and composition. This is al-Sijistānī's view as well, but for him the subject of creation extends beyond. Corporeal existence belongs exclusively to the realm of the senses which is the world of nature, the elements, form and matter. The world of intellect is different; it is pure and free of defect and endures endlessly, without change. The problem of creation, however, does not begin by an investigation of this relationship or how the Greeks described and understood the interaction between what belongs to the higher world of intellect and what comes and goes in the lower realm of sensation. As a primary concept creation must explain not this, but rather how the whole of these two worlds together came to be. And equally how it is that the unqualifiedly transcendent God qualifies as the agent who brought this about.

Again, as with the subject of *tawḥīd*, much in the answer of al-Sijistānī depends on a special vocabulary and a critical examination of the meaning of certain terms in order to restrict them to an exact role denoting specific forms of creative processes. To put it simply, for him, not all creation is the same; God's creation is utterly dissimilar to the creation observable by ordinary mortals.

A portion of the terms chosen to discuss this issue are, as one might expect,

Quranic. Quranic language serves as a supplier of material that must be both used and explained. In addition, however, al-Sijistānī borrows a number of words which were already in his time common in the literature about creation, particularly among those interested in philosophical explanations of this matter. Examples of the former include *al-Bāri'*, *al-Khāliq*, *al-Muṣawwir*, and *al-Badī'* and the verbs from which these participles derive. The latter category contains the complex of terms derived from the artificial word *ays* (being) which can have such forms as *ta'yīs* and *mu'ayyis*, and others which denote lower types of creating: *imbajasa*, *inba'atha*, *kawn*, and *fasād*, for example.

Most interesting of all these is *al-Badī'*<sup>2</sup> and the fourth form verb behind it *abda'a*. Long before al-Sijistānī, it was selected as the most worthy candidate for a technical term (actually a set of terms) providing a suitably abstract framework for a discussion of that unique power of God's by which He makes something out of nothing. It thus became the standard designation for the action of creation *ex nihilo*. As an active participle, *mubdī'*, it indicates God as the Originator. His unique act is the *ibdā'*, the "originating" or the "origination," and its result is *mubda'*, originated being or beings, *mubda'āt* in the plural. Al-Kindī had already found these words useful, although he would allow it to denote God's creative activity both in making the world at its beginning and in the resurrection of bodies at its end.<sup>3</sup> The *Theologia* also employs this word, although more frequently in its VIIIth form, *ibtada'a*, rather than the IVth, *abda'a*. As well it also appears in the writings of Isaac Israeli, in the *Fī maḥḍ al-khayr*, and in the *Pseudo-Ammonius*.<sup>4</sup> There is therefore nothing remarkable in al-Sijistānī's use of this term which he, in fact, shares with all the Neoplatonic material in Arabic at that time, including the writings of both his main Ismaili predecessors, al-Nasafī and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī.<sup>5</sup>

What follows is al-Kindī's definition:

It is clear that this kind of action belongs properly to God, who is the end of every cause, because making existent existences from the non-existent does not belong to anybody except Him. To this kind of action belongs properly the name of "origination" (*ibdā'*).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the *Fī maḥḍ al-khayr* specifies that the *ibdā'* belongs to the First Cause alone.<sup>7</sup> Al-Āmirī states that Plato in his *Timaeus* held the Creator to have "originated" (*abda'a*) the world from non-order (*lā niẓām*) to order (*niẓām*) – that is to say, from chaos to cosmos.<sup>8</sup> *Ibdā'* is "to make existent existences from the non-existent" (*ta'yīs al-aysāt 'an lays*). This definition, given by al-Kindī, accords exactly with al-Sijistānī's account of the same principle. He employs, in fact, the identical language, as does Isaac Israeli and the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, among others.<sup>9</sup>

In order, however, to expose the full complexity of the problem of creation for these Islamic Neoplatonists, it is necessary to analyze the whole of the picture that results. At its top the austere remote God is said to "act" in a unique manner to bring about the cosmos. The verb *abda'a* is rigorously segregated and reserved exclusively for this action. It is the making of all existent being(s) from nothing.

God is the Originator (*al-Mubdi'*). What constitutes existent being is the outcome of God's act which is called the origination (*al-ibdā'*) and the whole of existent being comes-into-being all at once (*daf'atan wāḥidatan*). Clearly it is essential for al-Sijistānī to indicate what God's "act" is or what it means but that he has trouble doing, although he firmly insists that it is a "command," an *amr* in Arabic, and for him creation is a single act in which the whole comes to exist. Nothing is left out; nothing is to be added or subtracted at a later time. There is but one *ibdā'*. God's act is perfect and therefore there is no need to alter or change any detail of it. The cosmos as a whole is complete.<sup>10</sup>

But if that is so, is there any possibility that existent being will come to an end? Will God destroy what He has created or could He do so? The answer for al-Sijistānī must be no. In a chapter of his *al-Yanābī'*, he argues for the proposition that "the existent does not become non-existent as the non-existent became the existent" (*al-'aysu lā yaṣīru laysan kāma ṣāra al-laysu 'aysan*).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere in the same work he states conclusively that God does not issue a second command or thereby act subsequently to the single *ibdā'*.<sup>12</sup> There is but one *amr*.<sup>13</sup> The net effect of these doctrines is to make the thing created by God eternal and perfect.<sup>14</sup> The *amr* itself is uncreated.<sup>15</sup>

In the first instance, originated being is the intellect which is, for al-Sijistānī, in fact, complete, perfect, and eternal. Being outside of time, it has timeless existence. From it in turn comes soul by another action described as "gushing" (*inbajasa*) or "procession" (*inba'atha*).<sup>16</sup> According to al-Sijistānī the difference between *ibdā'* and *inbijās* is that the first occurs out of nothing (*lā shay'*; *ex nihilo*) and the second from something (*min shay'*).<sup>17</sup> Soul, now being remote from the source of being, acts sequentially and creates time. All beings lower in rank than soul will come-to-be within time and they will undergo a process of generation and corruption. At this level everything that comes into existence does so out of something else that existed previously.

In his search for the root of the creation, al-Sijistānī, therefore, sees that the forms of creation observable by mankind bear no relationship to the act of God. What God creates encompasses all things and therefore the source of them cannot be a thing. But here instead of admitting that God Himself is that source or is the cause of being, al-Sijistānī recognized an intermediary between God and existent being. This cannot be a thing and hence, according to him, it must be an *amr*, a "fiat."<sup>18</sup>

One important aspect of this theory is its implicit reliance on a complicated, descending series of intermediaries bridging the gap between one form of creative activity and another. Mediation and the concept of mediators is vital. Al-Sijistānī carries this even further than many other authors by allowing for a mediating step above intellect.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the result of al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonic division of the creation process by levels according to the thing being created is reasonably intelligible. Only the last stage involves creation in time. All of the higher kinds of action, whether they are "origination" or "procession", are really timeless and therefore

are eternal, although only the first is truly timeless. The second has what is sometimes called a temporal eternity because it generates endlessly within a temporal mode, as is the case for celestial motions.<sup>20</sup>

In what sense are these acts, in fact, acts if they merely define the relationship between two eternal? This is the classic question that al-Ghazzālī asks in his refutation of Ibn Sīnā and the Philosophers.<sup>21</sup> Al-Sijistānī, at least a generation before Ibn Sīnā, must answer the same question because it is certainly relevant to his theory of both intellect and soul. His own response is that an action that fails to produce a perfect result is itself defective and in no sense can God's act be seen as being incomplete or imperfect – that is, to require something in addition to itself or the passing of time before reaching its completion.<sup>22</sup>

What further troubles these theological waters, however, is the other set of doctrines which seem to oppose what has already been claimed. Al-Sijistānī holds that God, the Originator, performs His act by issuing a command (*amr*).<sup>23</sup> By this he fully intends a conscious and willful imperative directed at something or to something and which, following Quranic language, is the imperative of the verb “to be” (*kun*). Based on scripture, he discusses at length what is implied in saying that God speaks, as He must when issuing the imperative fiat implied in His act of originating. Most of the answer given claims that God's speech is a metaphor for an abstraction which the idea of speech only symbolizes. But he claims further that intellect receives the “order” of God.<sup>24</sup> An important corollary doctrine, therefore, is the “word” (*kalima*; *logos*). The command is the “word” of God; just as it is also called, by those who subscribe to these concepts, the “will” (*al-irāda*). Equally, of course, it is the “originating” (*ibdā'*). All that is true of one of these terms is true of the others in this collection. They all signify the same entity.

But what is the command or the word exactly? In one sense they are aspects of the originating itself that subsequent to the origination merge in the intellect. They are what intellect is able to perceive of the fact by which it came to be and they are therefore, from its vantage, not something different from it. The originating (*al-ibdā'*) and the command are two terms for the same entity but this is actually intellect itself. Yet, the matter is not just this. Al-Sijistānī subscribes to a doctrine that sees the origination as an intermediary between God, as *Mubdī'*, and originated being, as *mubda'*, the latter being intellect. If intellect is the first of originated beings (*al-mubda'āt*), the first existent being (*ays* – that is, the first to have existentiality *aysiyya*), what is this intermediary? What status can it have ontologically? If origination is the affirmation of beingness over non-beingness (*al-aysiyya* over *al-laysiyya*), as he seems to hold, and if this is an eternal principle rather than an act properly so called, then the origination cannot have existence. Frequently, in fact, al-Sijistānī argues that *ibdā'* is non-beingness (*al-laysiyya*), though obviously this only indicates from where it came not what it is.<sup>25</sup>

These are the further complications of his theory of intermediaries. Al-Sijistānī insists that there is a mediator, a *wāsiṭa*, between God and the intellect and that this is the cause which creates the latter.<sup>26</sup> God cannot be categorized as a “cause” (*illa*), but rather the cause is His command or His word.<sup>27</sup> Al-Sijistānī's fear

is that all causes are intimately and necessarily related to their effects. The unqualifiedly transcendent God, the *Mubdi'*, the Originator, has no such relationship to intellect; instead His command, the *ibdā'*, does.<sup>28</sup>

Al-Sijistānī, like al-Nasafī and others before him, tried hard to express a doctrine that separates the agent from its activity and might thereby preserve the so-called agent from any necessary connection with the result or patient. This is of primary importance for the issues of transcendence and creation. Their solution – one already discussed in the *Pseudo-Ammonius* and widely recognized among some contemporary authors – was to argue that the activity is not identical either with the agent or with the patient even though from the perspective of the patient the act is inseparable from itself.<sup>29</sup> God is *mubdi'* (the Originator), His act is the *ibdā'* (the originating), but finally the *ibdā'* is the *mubda'* (the existent being).<sup>30</sup>

The unusual emphasis the Ismailis place on the “word” of God carries through into a lateral concern about God’s instructions for mankind and, all in all, forms a distinctive teaching in earlier Ismailism. Significantly, the only other place it appears is the *Longer Theologia*.<sup>31</sup> One description in the latter is as follows: “It [the Word] is neither rest nor movement, and because of this it is described as nothing (*lays*).”<sup>32</sup>

The command or the word is a sign of God’s involvement in making and ruling the cosmos. But as a doctrine of creation it implies a voluntarism that ought to be foreign to this kind of theology. The paradox does not seem to trouble al-Sijistānī. He is deeply concerned to locate the cause (*illa*) of the world which, according to his theory of transcendence, cannot be God. This he finds, not among the categories of things that exist in the world, but outside. Since it cannot be a thing, it must be a command.<sup>33</sup> The world exists by the command of God; it is *qāma bi-amr*.

One says of something that comes about at the ultimate limit intended for it that it was so ordered or commanded to be thus. Since the world as a whole and the sum of its parts and states comes about at the ultimate limit of the wisdom which is the will of the Creator . . . it is said for this reason that it exists by His command (*innahu qāma bi-amrihi*).<sup>34</sup>

The cosmos is a cosmos and not chaos because God’s order makes it so. His command is cosmos.<sup>35</sup>

This is, in part, another argument for the contingency of the world and in a sense it foreshadows Ibn Sīnā’s better stated doctrine of God as the necessarily existent-in-itself and the world as possibly existent or necessarily existent not through itself but through another. Both exist eternally but the latter is always contingent on the former. The determinant that makes originated being originated is the command or the origination.<sup>36</sup> The infinite becomes finite and the limit that creates the latter is what intellect knows as the identity (*huwīya*) or being (*innīya*) of God. But this is really itself since the infinite cannot be known.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Sijistānī clearly desires something beyond Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysical reduction. He seeks an assertion that creation is more than contingency, that a cause does not merely determine existence over non-existence, but rather imputes a

meaning and an order to that very fact of existence. God is the Creator not solely because He is the Originator but because all creation and creating is in some sense His. His creation is truly creative.

Curiously, this complex doctrine of the command as intermediary between being and non-being appears so rarely in Islamic thought that al-Bustī and others saw it as an Ismaili teaching, though even within the *da'wa* some authorities, such as al-Kirmānī, tried to deny it. Al-Kirmānī wrote a treatise to refute al-Sijistānī on this matter.<sup>38</sup> The one other prominent source for it, however, is the *Longer Theologia*, which is also, in all likelihood, its original Arabic source. Yet despite this connection it would be hazardous to claim that al-Sijistānī owes his concern for the doctrine of *ibdā'* and its various manifestations as Word/Logos, Will, and Command to the philosophical tradition on this evidence alone. Its history in the century prior to his time is so far much too obscure.<sup>39</sup> What is more certain is that he was its foremost Ismaili proponent. His writings on this issue became the standard expression of it among the Ismailis and perhaps elsewhere as is shown by al-Kirmānī's attempted rejection and Nāṣir-i Khusraw's repetition of them.<sup>40</sup>

## Intellect, the sum of existent being

To understand properly al-Sijistānī's doctrine concerning intellect, it is essential to approach it from two ostensibly different aspects. On the one hand, intellect – *'aql* in Arabic – is an angelic, hypostatic being standing at the absolute summit of creation (but, of course, not outside it). As the first “originated being,” *al-mubda' al-awwal*, and the first created being, intellect is the sum of all existents.

In this sense al-Sijistānī is an orthodox Neoplatonist. Most of Plotinus' teaching about intellect – *nous* in Greek – finds an echo in his writings. What begins to reveal a deviation from this tradition is his use of a special term for this primordial universal intellect. In Arabic it is *al-sābiq* – an unusual word which requires a technical term in English translation such as “the Preceder.” That in any case is the word used throughout this study for this special Arabic term. As a name for intellect, it does not occur in the Arabic Plotinian materials and it is as yet of an unknown origin outside of the Ismaili *da'wa* where, however, it is standard. Nevertheless, its meaning is relatively clear since it is one of a pair which always includes *al-tālī* or the Follower, and which is another way of referring to universal soul – that is, the universal form of soul.

The other aspect of intellect is its individual and particular representation in the human being. A major concern for al-Sijistānī is what can be known by humans and how they come to know it. Not surprisingly, knowledge, for him, comprises more than instinctual and learned apprehension of intelligible matter, as would be available to all humans. In addition there must exist a special category of inspired or revealed truth granted exclusively to prophets. Any theory of intellect must also explain the epistemology of this latter type of knowledge as well as the former. A question that predominates in the analysis of this latter type is to what degree prophetic revelation and inspiration are entirely different from common knowledge or constitute, rather, the ultimate perfection of it. Does the prophet know some truth that differs essentially from the data of philosophy and science or is his truth simply of a purer or more universal kind? To analyze issues like this, al-Sijistānī was forced to examine with great care the relationship between ordinary human intellect, with its method of apprehending intelligible properties, and the universal, hypostatic realm of primary intellect.

Obviously, the second aspect of intellect tends to move the question from

knowledge as such into the subject of prophecy, but it must be dealt with under the general investigation of intellect in addition. There are serious conflicts and tensions between a Neoplatonic theory that requires, on the one hand, the universality of intellect and implies its general accessibility to individual thinking humans and the Islamic (or Jewish) concept of prophecy that recognizes, on the other hand, a unique and exclusive epistemology in certain prophets. The most pressing issue is how the emanating source of knowledge – that is the universal intellect – can differentially single out one recipient for preferential treatment.

For a theory of revelation which holds that it occurs to one unique human only, or a discrete series of them, but not to others, the problem might be solved by arguing that the recipient is unique and not the message. Because the receiver of revelation is not like other men, he receives something they do not. Intellect thus remains universal and undifferentiated but the reception of it in various individual humans is radically dissimilar. This doctrine is, as will be seen, accepted by al-Sijistānī as part of his answer to this dilemma. Such a theory, however, places great emphasis on what causes or allows one human to attain vastly superior access to the intelligible world over another. And thus the mystery of why one individual possesses the status of choice in this case remains. Who determines this and more importantly how? Remembering that the intellect which will be the source of the revelation is a universal, unchanging being, the problem confronting al-Sijistānī and his fellow Neoplatonists is how its benefits can be received by a prophet at a substantially higher level than is possible for ordinary mortals, even those of relatively great capacity for intellectual activity. Al-Sijistānī does not hold that the great philosophers and scientists were or could have been prophets. The difference between their knowledge and that of the prophets is substantial and fundamental.<sup>1</sup>

The term *Preceder* provides some clues to the way al-Sijistānī and the Ismailis perceive this element in the Neoplatonic hierarchy that discloses an understanding of it somewhat at odds with the standard philosophical tradition. This name lays greatest stress on rank and position in relationship to all that follows. In this idea there is something foreign to ancient Neoplatonism. Intellect is a substance that encompasses all things; it is the thingness of everything.<sup>2</sup> As such it exists to one degree or another in all things, as in the same way all things exist in it. These are Neoplatonic notions al-Sijistānī accepts. But why then does he emphasize the priority of intellect in a way that makes it “precede” all other things, rather than merely be the first among them? Al-Sijistānī’s preservation and cultivation of the term *Preceder* indicates that the universal intellect is not simply a universal, imperishable, eternal primary substance, but is more of an angelic being standing in rank before and above all other beings. In a way, like God, intellect is also transcendent. As the *Preceder* it retains a uniquely transcendent status which it loses by being simply intellect and therefore immanent. Its personification is important as indicating rank; like the lawgiving prophet in the terrestrial world, intellect remains the supreme lord of its own particular realm – the primary and universal realm of existent being.



The more primitive, Gnostic cosmology of the Ismailis had, in place of al-Sijistānī's intellect and soul, *kūnī* and *qadar*, which they called the two "roots," in Arabic, *aṣlān*. Although it is uncertain how much to make of the way these angels are paired in this cosmology, their ranking is important. According to a Gnostic interpretation of this doctrine, the Two Roots become the demiurgic masters of a world they themselves fashion on behalf of God. Al-Sijistānī and his philosophically attuned colleagues preferred to upgrade and fortify this mythology by introducing as much of the more sophisticated and creditable material from philosophy as would not directly contradict its basic facts. From its concepts of temporal and physical ranking, they moved in the direction of metaphysical gradations wherein time and space have no meaning or relevance at all. What survives in al-Sijistānī's thought is the concept of the Preceder. In one system it is the angel *kūnī*, who is first of the Two Roots, while in the other it is Plotinus' *nous*, but in that of al-Sijistānī it is both of these.

Although none of his works contain ideas not in harmony with what he states in his *al-Yanābī'*, this treatise deals most directly with the problems of intellect. It contains at least ten separate chapters on intellect covering such themes as intellect's imperishability,<sup>3</sup> its tranquillity and quiescence,<sup>4</sup> its position as first of originated being prior to which nothing can be conceived,<sup>5</sup> its existence as a being perfect both in potentiality and in actuality,<sup>6</sup> its immateriality,<sup>7</sup> how it communicates its benefits to soul,<sup>8</sup> and seven categories of its special faculties and properties.<sup>9</sup> The picture that he presents there fully supports the Neoplatonic view of intellect: it is the indivisible, primary substance which contains the idea of all subsequent beings which it therefore encompasses. And yet there is no change in it, no affection touches it, and it does not merge in any way with the beings it engenders. Emanating does not diminish its being.

In the other works he also speaks of the intellect and employs in them both the technical, philosophical approach of the *Yanābī'* and in addition uses general terms that seem foreign to it. A most interesting example of the latter is the extravagant language in the introduction to his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* where he characterizes the relationship between God and intellect in the following way:

[God it is] Who inserts into the first existent [i.e. intellect] the form of all things, obvious and hidden, and makes it Preceder to every end and beginning . . . Who emanates upon the first existent such lights and such radiance that none can know anything behind it . . . Who because of the profusion of His generosity and His power forgoes the governance of the two worlds and what they contain of the sublime and mundane in favor of the first Preceder which He thus makes lord of the lords and the ultimate recourse in the passing of the ages . . . Who makes the Preceder the wellspring of all spiritual and physical light.<sup>10</sup>

Another example is his discussion of *tawḥīd* in the first section of his *Sullam al-najāt* where he notes that of God it cannot be said that "there is no definition to Him, no characteristic of Him, no description for Him, no motion or transportation in Him, and no place about Him." This kind of negative attribution applies,

al-Sijistānī insists, to intellect because the attributes of spiritual and hence intellectual existence have this quality rather than God.<sup>11</sup>

Intellect is the “most abundant of all creatures in substance” and yet there exists no disparity (*tafāwut*) at all in that substance.<sup>12</sup> Being undifferentiated it is like the center of a circle which has no circumference<sup>13</sup> or like the one that is the first of all other numbers and which also exists in all of them. These characterizations also belong to the Neoplatonic tradition concerning intellect.<sup>14</sup>

When intellect examines its own higher aspect – that facing in the direction of its origin – it finds there the logos or word of God, called also the command, the will, the oneness. Unlike the logos, intellect is an existent, an *ays*, and is the first existent, no existent precedes it. Therefore, what appears to it as if that might be its own origin is, in purely rational terms, a non-existence, although in reality that “non-existence” is henceforth nothing other than intellect itself. This is all that intellect knows of the Originator, since knowledge is a category that does not comprehend or include the transcendent God. Knowledge does not encompass the unlimited; the infinite cannot be known.<sup>15</sup> The identity of God is therefore unknown, except in so far as His identification has left an impression of itself on and in intellect. In other words the “being” known as God is intellect.<sup>16</sup>

Because of its unmediated proximity to the origination, intellect is perfect both in its essence and in its activity. This means that nothing is missing from it; nothing lacking in it. The intellectual realm, therefore, does not change; it is not transformed by acquisition or loss. It is a world of fixed and tranquil stability, lasting out a timeless eternity. What is truly intellectual is a part of this eternal world and participation in it is the access to eternity itself.

Thingness (*shay'īya*) or the specific universal ideal model of any thing is intellectual. Al-Sijistānī thus believes in universals and follows in this respect the tradition of Plato. There is no hint in his thought of any concept of abstracting these universals from their individual particulars. An inductive enumeration of particulars does not yield knowledge of universals. Intellect holds and is the thingness of all things, which are all seeded in it.<sup>17</sup> They, therefore, exist timelessly, and are prior to each particular instance of the thing and they are the cause that moves what is potentially something to become actually that something. This universal intellect is a single substance; it will not and does not break apart. Therefore the multiplication of cosmic secondary intellects – a doctrine favored by al-Fārābī, al-Kirmānī, and Ibn Sīnā, to name its most prominent Islamic exponents – is alien to al-Sijistānī's system and simply does not make sense in it. Moreover, because there is only one intellect, the concept of an “active intellect” as the lowest of ten lords of the nine spheres is impossible and would be rejected. Intellect does not multiply by becoming separate beings; its diversity does not result from place, position or rank.<sup>18</sup>

In the sixteenth chapter of his *al-Yanābī'*, al-Sijistānī sets out a list of seven categories or specific properties of intellect. As given they are temporal eternity (*dahr*), truth (*ḥaqq*), happiness (*surūr*), demonstration (*burhān*), life (*ḥayāt*), perfection (*kamāl*), and self-subsistency (*ghunya*).<sup>19</sup> Of these he claims that

temporal eternity is the least and self-subsistency is the greatest in value. However, all are diverse powers of intellect that commence upon its origination; none of them develops in it later.

As an explanation of the manifold properties of intellect, this list is not easily understood either with regard to the context in which al-Sijistānī brings it up or in matching it to any other discussion by him. The Arabic Plotinus material does not possess an equivalent.<sup>20</sup> Self-subsistency, which al-Sijistānī holds as the greatest of all faculties of intellect, often appears in his writings as one of a pair with perfection. Under most circumstances, however, the two might be taken as implying the same meaning.<sup>21</sup> The situation of this chapter in the *Yanābī'* quite possibly indicates that he is speaking of intellect from a vantage other than the universal, namely the mind in single or particular humans. If the reference is to a single human intellect, all of these faculties must point to special functions of the individual human mind. He maintains, of course, that what is true of individual mind is also true of universal mind, although the reverse – that a single human mind is coextensive with universal intellect – is not true.

One of the unsolved problems with the text of the *Yanābī'* is a manuscript tradition that reads, in place of self-subsistency (*ghunya*), occultation (*ghayba*). The latter term presents major difficulties as to its meaning since this is the only passage of al-Sijistānī's works in which it appears. The sense of a word which might imply something like "absence from sight" or "hidden" in terms of the properties of intellect is not immediately obvious.<sup>22</sup> More likely, however, this is merely a mistake of the scribal tradition.

From Quranic sources several other names had come to be attached to intellect – at least in Ismaili parlance. They are the seat (*kursī*), the pen (*qalam*), the decree (*qaḍā'*), and the sun (*shams*).<sup>23</sup> Unlike the others, these terms were clearly adopted from the religious tradition. In any case they do not represent powers or faculties of intellect as much as its position vis à vis the soul. Nevertheless al-Sijistānī does occasionally include these concepts in his discussion of intellect, especially when seeing it as an angelic being.

On its inner horizon intellect begets soul and intellect is the immediate cause of soul in a double sense. On the one hand, it actually creates soul by emitting an informed image of itself and, on the other, it regulates and directs her as her teacher and mentor. In turn through soul – that is, through its persisting influence in her – intellect comes into the beings soul herself engenders. Thus nature which is an effect of soul preserves in itself rational qualities because it is, in this sense, the embodiment of intellect.

The second procedure for investigating intellect results from its immediate accessibility to humans directly through their own personal mental existence. Man obtains the benefit of intellect through his soul, or to be more precise, through that portion of soul that is in him. Because an individual contains soul, that person may participate in the effects of intellectual activity due to the intimate relationship between intellect, as mentor, and soul, as pupil. When soul turns toward her source, she and all portions of her, participate in the world of mind. The mind is

what it thinks. When guided exclusively by intellect, soul returns to an intelligible existence. This al-Sijistānī might equally call a spiritual existence, using the Arabic term *rūḥānī*, since he considers spiritual and intellectual (*rūḥānī* and *'aqlī*) to be synonymous. Thus in one sense the spiritual world is the intellectual world, although this equation is not exact because the most important question for him involves access to that world. Having the capacity for thought does not confer on the thinker more than a relatively small portion of the spiritual or intellectual realm. Thinking does not itself generate more than an elemental spirituality. Nevertheless, if the ultimate goal of mankind is the achievement of spiritual existence, then such an existence is to be found by completing the transition from mundane, corporeal attachments to a final and total liberation by an exclusive devotion to the true, eternal life of the mind. Thus the connection between the intellectual accomplishment of an individual in terms of the amount of knowledge that person possesses or comes to possess and the reality of what might be called cosmic intellect is critical for all other factors in that cosmos.

The passage mentioned above about the special properties of intellect seems to outline those powers within intellect that are immediately available to individual minds as they think. What is lacking is a secondary factor, at least with respect to ordinary human rationality. That involves a form of intellect that is inaccessible in the absence of the emissaries deputized exclusively to impart it. This obviously leads to the theme of prophecy which bears strongly on this latter factor. Although it will be discussed more fully in a later context, it is nevertheless essential to bring it up here even if only briefly.

Al-Sijistānī's teachings argue forcefully that intellect invests the whole of physical existence with some degree of rationality. Intellect constitutes, for example, a natural, instinctual rationality within creation in general and in mankind in particular. He insists that intellect is, in fact, the first emissary from the Maker (i.e. the Originator) to creation. He then adds that the lawgiving prophet is a later messenger. Thus whereas nature is intellect incarnate, the revelation provided by the speaking-prophet is also "intellect incarnate" (*'aql mujassam*). The universe as a whole is infused with intellect coming into it via the soul. Intellect and scripture agree.<sup>24</sup> Scripture and nature therefore can both be studied to disclose the presence of intellect and by the acquisition of the evidence of that wisdom which inheres in either, man moves towards his spiritual (intellectual) paradise.

These parallel emissions from intellect might require only that an individual examine and study both without restriction, the access to either being open to any one possessing the requisite intellectual capacity. That is not true according to al-Sijistānī. Rather, while the first is an innate feature of mankind and the world at large, the second requires admission to another channel – one highly restricted by those appointed to protect and guard it.

The whole process has four distinct stages. Each represents a different degree or aspect of intellect as it exists vis à vis the individual within the corporeal world. The first is a natural or instinctual rationality through which man acquires

intelligible properties such as the primary intelligibles and simple wisdom. This act of ordinary learning takes place without regard to the later, restricted channel to intellectual life. That commences at the second stage which provides a kind of intellect that issues solely from the prophets who “speak” – that is, those who actually turn spiritual truth into words – one of the specific ways in which intellect becomes incarnate. The prophet performs the role of incarnator by virtue of his capacity to enunciate the law and the law is, of course, religion itself.<sup>25</sup> The third stage is the law on its own in its codified or scriptural form. It is now, at this level, statutory, having become a corporate embodiment, existing independently from its spiritual and intellectual origin. Nevertheless rationality continues to require its application. Such intellect al-Sijistānī calls the intellect of scripture or “scriptural intellect” (*‘aql mu’ allaf*). Note that the implementation of the law is itself a rational act: law is Islam and Islam is the fulfillment of reason. Finally, there is an intellect that determines the meaning of the law – its *ta’wīl* or interpretation. Unlike the first stage reached by “acquiring” knowledge, this last step involves “acquired” knowledge, pointing to its unique and reserved status. The “interpretation” (*ta’wīl*) of the law is available only through obedience to the imams and members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They alone teach and propagate the “acquirable” truth. Intellect reaches man first solely in so far as he is man, but its final and ultimate stage in him consists of the truths embedded in the sacred law and these are not accessible outside of the normative hierarchy. The *da’wa* functions like an ecclesiastical instrument that dispenses an intellectual sacrament and hence this final intellect is truly an acquired and not an innate perfection.<sup>26</sup>

In the final analysis ordinary human intellect reflects true intellect only imperfectly, even at its best. The intellectual realm remains closed to it except in part, because bodily sensations are the normal avenue of human understanding and they remain so. The result of an acquisition of knowledge should convey eternal being to its recipient, but since it never arrives free of some impediment contributed by a dependence on physical conceptions and material examples, the body inevitably contaminates knowledge. Physical existence hinders an individual’s access to pure intellect. Only a perfectly balanced physical disposition, an absolutely harmonious temperament, can release an individual from this corporeal restraint and allow that fortunate soul to ascend at will into the intellectual realm.<sup>27</sup> Al-Sijistānī claims that occasionally, but only occasionally, the distinction between the sublime and the mundane is effaced.<sup>28</sup> Thereupon the grace of God grants to the rare person thus blessed a vision of true intellectual reality, free of material restraints. The resulting vision is revelation. Subsequently, this form of intellect becomes incorporated as scripture and is thereafter understood through an interpretation that seeks to recover that timeless, intellectual reality which the written law only simulates with its earthly, linguistic symbols.

Surely, despite combining a number of elements that are hard to reconcile, al-Sijistānī’s doctrine of intellect as whole ultimately seeks a single comprehensive and coherent teaching. He explains these several elements with less

difficulty when he speaks in a Neoplatonic manner about hypostatic intellect. As his method of analysis approaches the problems of intellect in individual human beings, other matters, such as the issue of prophecy, impinge on this subject and sharply restrict and sometimes tend to confuse his pronouncements because the problem of specific prophetic intellect does not readily accommodate the theory of universal, hypostatic intellect. Moreover, these latter issues were never dealt with by him outside of his discussion of other themes that include salvation, scripture and interpretation as well. He did not write a treatise on the intellect in any case and therefore, for the moment, the comments offered here are, in part, preliminary because they require supplementary information from a larger context supplied by an investigation of these other areas.

## Descending and ascending soul

The mate of intellect is soul and the two together form the two roots (*aṣlān*) of the spiritual world as it exists independently of physical being. The concept of soul is particularly important in Neoplatonism because it is soul and not intellect *per se* that bridges the gap between the theoretical life of pure mind and the complex realm in which the human being plays out the struggle to avoid the temptation of material existence.<sup>1</sup> The Islamic Aristotelians denied that such a soul is something other than a form of intellect, and there is no clearer issue of difference separating these two factions in Islamic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Those, like al-Sijistānī, who made of the soul a universal, hypostatic being, as well as the permanently enduring, animating spirit of the individual human, were few. His ultimate inspiration for this can only have been Plotinus but as with so many of the other ideas he took from ancient sources the parallels for his doctrine of the soul in the existing materials are in portions of the *Longer Theologia* which do not have a known Greek source.

Significantly, the pair intellect and soul were so prominent in the teaching of the Ismailis following al-Sijistānī that they became viewed as characteristic elements of their thought. Ibn Sīnā remarks in his autobiography that as a youth he used to listen to an account of intellect and soul in the manner taught by the Ismailis which was offered by his own father and brother – themselves both Ismaili.<sup>3</sup> At nearly the same time, al-Kirmānī, who like Ibn Sīnā rejected the notion of universal soul, also like him had to contend with a firmly established Ismaili teaching that included them both. A major purpose of al-Kirmānī's *al-Riyāḍ* is to undo his immediate predecessors' position with respect to the doctrine of soul and thereby eliminate it in Ismaili doctrine.

Already in his polemical *al-Ifṭikhār*, al-Sijistānī himself felt the necessity of defending the concepts of intellect and soul which were apparently taken as characteristic of Ismaili doctrines even in his time. Some person or group had questioned their validity in this earlier instance by noting that a teaching about intellect and soul does not appear in the Holy Scripture. This is a valid observation, of course, if the reference is to the all important universal categories of intelligible reality as first described by Plotinus and later adopted by the Islamic Neoplatonists. In following them, al-Sijistānī is loyal to the fundamental axioms

of Neoplatonism, rather than scripture, and is therefore open to serious objections. He, however, does not see a conflict in this. For him these two ways of viewing reality complement rather than contradict each other. Besides, the *Qur'ān*, he insists, does contain plenty of indirect references confirming the truth of this doctrine. In his reply he cites a list of verses which, in one way or another, mention either intellect or the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Soul, as this universal, angelic mate of intellect, recalls the *qadar* of the pair *kūnī-qadar*, which it, of course, is. It is also the Tablet (*lawḥ*) and the moon (*qamar*) to intellect's Pen and sun. Again these terms are holdovers from earlier accounts which al-Sijistānī has retained and which he continues to use and defend. As with intellect, rank plays a prominent role in explaining soul. The soul is the Follower and the Second: in Arabic *al-tālī* and *al-thānī* respectively. The term Follower emphasizes the original doubling of intellect and soul. As the Two Roots are a pair, there is no allowance for a third, fourth, or fifth. Once more the stream of ten intellects claimed by the Aristotelians was precluded within this system.

Being lower than that of intellect, the rank of soul carries with it an inherent imperfection in the sense that it exists one step removed from the origination and thus also from the Originator. Between it and God, there is a fully existing intermediary and therefore a shadow, as it were, is cast over it. Al-Sijistānī, however, maintains resolutely that originating involves no inducement of good or a repulsing of evil. The originating is perfect and gives rise to a perfect first being in which evil and malevolence have no scope whatsoever.<sup>5</sup> But the same is not quite true of soul. At her level choice exists.<sup>6</sup> Since intellect is the resort of the truth and the good, and since the mind is what it thinks and cannot be otherwise than it is, when it thinks, it thinks the truth and only the truth. Soul, however, must rely on intellect and in so doing appeal to something that she is not in order to learn and be taught the distinction between the truth and the false, the good and the bad. A moral dilemma begins with soul<sup>7</sup> and this is further complicated by the emergence within soul of nature and the concomitant beginning of the physical world. The real moral problem of soul is whether to cast her gaze above to the pure realm of intellect, which is the residence of truth and goodness, or below to the wondrous delights of a world of her own making.

However she may decide to act, she must, in fact, act, which is to move, to seek, to desire. The soul is, to use the definition commonly applied to her by al-Sijistānī (as well as others), an "everlastingly mobile substance" (*jawhar mutaḥarrik baqī*). A more complete definition is given in his *Maqālīd* as follows:

Soul is an eternally moving substance, dyed with spiritual colors, taking benefit from what is above it to what is below it.<sup>8</sup>

This characterization of soul also occurs using nearly the same words in the *Longer Theologia*.<sup>9</sup> Soul is thus both an enduring and a moving being; she is therefore neither perishable nor tranquil. Her motion never ceases.<sup>10</sup> Restlessly, she attempts to acquire the perfection and stability of intellect but cannot do so. Al-Sijistānī says that intellect has emanated upon soul a longing for intellect – that



is, for itself – but also at the same time an inherent incapacity to reach its rank.<sup>11</sup> Both this longing and this incapacity are emanations of intellect. Soul thereby continually acquires some portion of mind only to lose it either in sinking back into a lower manner of being or in moving on to acquire yet another aspect of intellect. Because she is unable to grasp the whole of intellect at once,<sup>12</sup> she thinks it in a discursive fashion following a temporal mode. The period of her longing for intellect, however, never ends.<sup>13</sup>

The origin of soul happens when intellect first turns to regard itself.

Primary intellect which is perfect in both potentiality and in actuality . . . was the cause of its mate at the moment of regarding its own essence. There generated out of it the form of its essence at the moment it regarded that essence.<sup>14</sup>

The process involved in the creation of soul is called procession or emission (*inbi'āth*). What results, being defective to the degree of its remoteness from the One, is also potentially something that it is not at any given moment. It has perfection therefore only as a potentiality.<sup>15</sup> In the activity necessary for continually moving toward its own actualization, it creates a sequential, and hence temporal, function which is time itself.<sup>16</sup>

Al-Sijistānī had no truck for some of his colleagues in the *da'wa* who held that time is co-extensive with intellect and in his *Nuṣra* this was one of the major points of contention between himself and Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī.<sup>17</sup> His position is that of the orthodox Neoplatonists who maintain that time is the life of the soul in its attempt to apprehend fully the content of intellect.

The role of soul as herself an intermediary between intellect and nature is not easy to understand,<sup>18</sup> although her own activity is explicitly stated to consist of ascending to intellect and descending into particular existence within the corporeal world which is within nature.<sup>19</sup> The primary function of soul, both as universal and as an individual portion allotted to single humans, is this activity of ascending and descending. Without it there could be no benefit of intellect in the lower world. Soul bears the responsibility of conveying reason into the mundane realm. What is more difficult to explain is how the physical realm actually came into existence. This is quite evident in the way al-Sijistānī returns time and again to deal with various facets of this problem but frequently expresses frustration with the difficulty of aspects of the subject.

The basic formula is as follows. Out of motion and repose soul engenders two categories within herself: form and matter. The mixing of form and matter makes bodily, physical being. This process produces nature. The crucial relationship between soul and nature is better explained by the Greek terms *psyche* (as in psychology) and *physis* (as in physiology). For al-Sijistānī the *psyche* produces the *physis*; psychology explains physiology. These terms more directly convey the meaning of this affiliation than the English words “soul” and “nature” or the Arabic *nafs* and *ṭabī'a*. Although the outermost limit of physical being is the celestial sphere, they, as well as all of nature, are within soul. Soul encompasses them, just as intellect encompasses her.

Therefore soul has two sides: one facing intellect, the other nature.<sup>20</sup> A useful term al-Sijistānī employs in this context is "horizon" (*ufq*), although he also calls the outer and inner limits in the rank of soul "sides" (*ṭaraf*). Horizon better defines what is actually entirely outside the realm where spatial relationship or placement apply.

Despite this concept which seems to separate soul and nature, no such boundary is definitely marked. Soul, in creating the physical world, tends to become enmeshed within it. She descends into it and remains there, submerged or sinking, often unwilling or unable to free herself and return upward. "Soul," al-Sijistānī says, "plunges into nature to the furthest limit."<sup>21</sup> And she is also forgetful.

. . . many rational souls that surrender to nature and obey it and its appetites and its pleasures . . . they forget their true world, its light and beauty.<sup>22</sup>

Passages like this from al-Sijistānī's early work, the *Nuṣra*, convey in a succinct fashion the importance of soul and its vital role in a kind of cosmic moral drama. It is easy as well to confirm these attitudes in his latter treatises. *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* contains a similar account.

Souls that are attached to the individual human being might forget her world and become infatuated with the world of nature, inclining to it, attached and enthralled, ceasing to maintain the transcendence of her Originator by not holding His sanctity above the characteristics of those He rules but rather making comparisons between Him and what she now has an infatuation for . . .<sup>23</sup>

In fact, it is soul's forgetfulness that ultimately creates the need for the revelation of the sacred law in order, as al-Sijistānī puts it, "to halt in her that squalid anthropomorphism and filthy negated faith that sully her."<sup>24</sup>

A number of major problems are connected to al-Sijistānī's position. He is, of course, upholding substantially the tenets of the Neoplatonists, but in so doing he comes close to at least two rather troublesome contentions that plagued them as well. One leads to Gnosticism in regarding soul as a demiurge responsible for the state and condition of the physical world. The other involves metempsychosis by allowing that the soul both forgets and remembers a world in which she was previous to her engagement to the body.

The Gnostic encroachment would imply that al-Sijistānī believed that it was not God who created the world but, in this case, the soul and that, accordingly, the world is evil because it is not the product of a truly benevolent Maker. In *iqḷīd* no. 30 of *al-Maqālīd*, al-Sijistānī groups together a number of opponents who tend toward this doctrine, including among them apparently Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who was one of those who upheld the pre-existing eternity of both soul and prime matter (*hayūlā*). The Dualists (*al-Thanawīya*) and the Manicheans (*al-Majūs*) are in this group as well. Al-Sijistānī is more or less correct in his assessment. The main problem is whether soul's action differs from or is prior to God's own creating. Al-Sijistānī's position is that soul's activity results directly from God's

originating (via intellect), and that there is absolutely no sense in which soul acts independently.<sup>25</sup>

Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's ideas about pre-existing soul are interesting, in part, because they mirror those of Plato, as put forth in his *Timaeus*. Their pedigree in philosophical terms is relatively sound. Platonic doctrine admits metempsychosis and the transmigration of soul from one body to another. This notion was perpetuated quite explicitly in Greek Neoplatonic writings, although there was disagreement among the later writers as to whether soul moved from human into animal bodies or only into other human bodies.<sup>26</sup> Two key medieval witnesses accused al-Sijistānī of believing in a form of metempsychosis which maintains that the soul moves from body to body within a single species. The sources here are al-Bīrūnī – in his discussion of metempsychosis in his treatise on India – and a latter Ismaili *dā'i*, the famous poet, Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Both are normally quite reliable.<sup>27</sup>

Although al-Sijistānī explicitly challenges and rejects transmigration in the extant material written by him, it is hard to confirm his exact view of this particular form of metempsychosis since the very concept of soul “forgetting” and “remembering” presupposes that it has an existence outside of the individual body to which it is temporarily attached. Without question al-Sijistānī recognizes in some manner the concept of soul “forgetting” her own world. Does the soul therefore “remember” a previous existence? Does it “forget” its bodily life once it separates from the sensations of physical being? These are additional questions which might indicate the relationship between the soul in body and the soul once freed of body.

The thirty-seventh *iqḷīd* of *al-Maqālīd* asks the latter question in its title: “That Soul when it Separates from the Body Does Any of its Knowledge Cease or Not?” Al-Sijistānī's answer is that temporal events and knowledge of them certainly do come to an end because soul once outside of body is not confined either by physical fact or temporal sequence. The discrete facts of a corporeal life no longer possess significance; they cease to exist. The implication is clear: soul no longer remembers its individual, particular existence since it now participates in true, timeless knowledge which is mind itself.

Al-Kirmānī noted this problem in his *Riyāḍ* and recorded his own unease with the ideas of al-Sijistānī about soul's “forgetting.”<sup>28</sup> The implications he sees in this doctrine lead eventually to the objectionable doctrine of transmigration, but al-Kirmānī goes on to exonerate al-Sijistānī by citing the forty-fourth *iqḷīd* of *al-Maqālīd*, which contains a relatively explicit denial of metempsychosis, although not specifically addressed to this formation of the problem.<sup>29</sup>

When cosmic soul sinks into the realm of nature, its most important residence there is man because the human being preserves an access to spiritual substances in virtue of the rationality inherent in him. This is not merely a consideration of the logical ordering of the physical universe, whose mechanics behave according to the dictates of reason, but of an ability to choose between two opposites such as good and bad, beauty and grotesque, benefit and harm. Here the confusion

between soul as a universal and as a particular becomes crucial. Against what is perhaps the dominant trend in Islamic philosophy and also against many of his own Ismaili colleagues, al-Sijistānī argued that the souls of individual men are all parts of that same universal, cosmic soul. His doctrine was outlined as forthrightly as possible in his *al-Yanābī*'. Two chapters of that work declare that human soul is a part or portion of universal soul. At one point, moreover, he states that those who deny this lack discernment and knowledge. Surely his chief opponent on this issue is none other than Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī.<sup>30</sup>

The idea that when soul descends into the world, she does so in a way which allows her to be partly there and partly here is the doctrine of Plotinus, although not of some other Neoplatonists, such as Proclus. There is some likelihood that Abū Ḥātim follows Proclus whereas al-Sijistānī keeps to the teaching of Plotinus, as had al-Nasafī before him.<sup>31</sup>

Implicit in the descent of soul is the idea of a journey or sojourn. Al-Sijistānī does speak of soul's sojourn (*sulūk* or *safar*) in several places<sup>32</sup> and in one of these he also mentions its "vehicle" (*markab*).<sup>33</sup> His doctrine in these instances is less than certain since the material in question is brief, consisting of one or two lines in each case. However, it does fit a known ancient Neoplatonic scheme which regards the soul as acquiring a bodily vehicle that becomes increasingly dense as the individual soul moves downward into its terrestrial habitat. In reverse it sheds these shell-like accretions as it reverts upward toward its original existence.<sup>34</sup>

The return of individualized souls to their true, spiritual state is an important theme for al-Sijistānī because this is the road to salvation and eternal paradise, a reversal of its downward course. The soul exists in the human in a way similar to that of universal soul. This allows it occasionally to range from nature upward to intellect and back. Human soul possesses five external and five internal faculties or senses: hearing, seeing, smell, taste, and feeling; and thought, cognition, reflection, intellection, and memory.<sup>35</sup> Al-Sijistānī's notion of the internal senses presents a picture of soul as something capable of acquiring the benefits of reason. He says further that the coming to soul of "intellectual benefits" (*al-fawā'id al-'aqliya*) causes the activation of the individual's "invisible form" (*al-šūra al-khafiya*).<sup>36</sup> A key verb he employs is "to manifest" (*zahara*) which must mean in this context to manifest in a permanent mode, that is to come to an existence that no longer suffers from transitory changes and transformations. Change is a condition of the body, but in so far as soul acquires the repose and tranquillity of intellectual existence, the flux within and about her ceases. The temporal manner of being stops and a permanent and eternal mode commences. The soul realizes its "sublime form" (*al-šūra al-laṭīfa*)<sup>37</sup> or its "noble, spiritual form" (*al-šūra al-rūḥāniya al-sharīfa*)<sup>38</sup> by the emergence of the hidden one upon separating from the body.

Soul, thus, must learn or take benefit (*istafāda*) from intellect<sup>39</sup> and if what she learns can be kept unmixed or uncontaminated by corporeal things, it will raise her to the highest station she can reach. This latter step is not simple. No ordinary human can free its conceptual processes entirely from spatial or temporal

references. To put it another way, no person enjoys a purely mental existence, not even the greatest scientists and philosophers. To do so would, in essence, negate soul and psychic existence, since there cannot be soul which is entirely intellectual without becoming intellect itself.<sup>40</sup> For al-Sijistānī, however, certain humans possess an ability for direct and almost total access to the timeless, static reality of intellect. This depends not only on the perfection of the intellectual faculties of the soul but of the whole disposition and temperament of that individual. There is, therefore, more to the purity of this person than rational acumen, and ultimately the full benefit of intellect comes only to the few pure souls so chosen and inspired by God.

## Nature and the physical realm

The next step in the downward direction is the realm of nature and with it the beginning of physical reality. In moving from soul to this product of soul, al-Sijistānī leaves the areas of the greatest tensions between his philosophical understanding of the divine world and a theology required by tradition and scripture. He appears to believe that nature, in so far as it is not a part of the divine world, is, for the most part, a subject best investigated by the scientists. The *Qur'ān* and other sources of Islamic religious dogmas do not contain a concept of nature which, for the most part, either support or deny the material about it in Greek thought. Where problems persist in al-Sijistānī's discussions of nature and the corporeal or terrestrial realm, they are often technical, although a number of points of potential conflict do arise out of the implications implicit in his theories as a whole.

Prominent among the troublesome aspects of al-Sijistānī's concept of nature is that, for him, it is only within the natural world that temporal creation actually takes place. One of the technical difficulties is the status of nature: whether it is as an active and productive force or simply an inherent principle of motion. In general Islamic thinkers voiced considerable uncertainty about what nature is and the term itself was commonly taken to be highly ambiguous.<sup>1</sup> Yet another problem was explaining how something composed and compounded could derive from the pure and sublime: in other words how the physical, synthetic world arises from the spiritual. Nature, broadly speaking, is both the hypostatic enduring law of physical composition and yet also the temporal, individual particulars that are the results of these combinations. This latter question about how physical reality arises out of the spiritual, al-Sijistānī admits, is so obscure that it ultimately requires an answer based on prophetic inspiration, if there is to be an answer at all.<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty of explaining the origin of physical existence – that is, how soul could produce nature, which then engendered natures, and finally the elements fire, air, water and earth – was never resolved. Al-Nasafī's dilemma about the composition of the celestial bodies and about the production of elements from the natures (*al-ṭabā'i*'), which al-Bustī reported, suggests an intense but unfinished conflict about nature among the early authorities. It is likely that al-Sijistānī had

himself no fixed opinion on many issues in this matter but rather gratefully accepted various notions of his ancient, or even not so ancient, philosophical predecessors. In one paragraph of his *al-Yanābīʿ*, for example, he notes two definitions of nature: the active (or productive) power (*al-qūwa al-fāʿila*) and the principle of motion (*mabdaʾ al-ḥaraka*).<sup>3</sup> He makes no choice between them.<sup>4</sup> At other times he confesses willingly to the extraordinary complexity of various problems connected to this subject.

Nature arises within soul and this process al-Sijistānī describes as “gushing” (*inbijās*).<sup>5</sup> Since soul contains two contrary dispositions: motion and repose; in what she produces, these create a further pair: form and matter. Matter passively accepts the alternation in it of forms. Thus matter is inert and form constantly changing. The result of the union of form and matter is physical being which may also be defined as the world of substance and the nine accidents, or in other words the ten categories listed by Aristotle: substance (*jawhar*), quantity (*kammīya*), quality (*kayfīya*), relation (*muḍāf*), time (*zamān*), place (*makān*), possession (*jida*), position (*nuṣba*), affection (*mafʿūl*), and action (*fāʿil*). Al-Sijistānī mentions the categories in this order and calls them as a whole the “world of nature” (*ʿālam al-ṭabīʿa*).<sup>6</sup>

Another common way for him to describe nature is by reference to the celestial spheres of which there are seven.<sup>7</sup> The lords who govern the motion of these spheres are called Fathers (*abāʾ*).<sup>8</sup> The primary principles of nature are the “natures” (*al-ṭabāʾiʿ* or *ʿanāṣir*), namely hot, cold, wet, and dry. Once these are activated, they combine to produce elements (*mufradāt, ustuqṣāt*): earth, water, air, and fire.<sup>9</sup> For example, when the hot nature of air dissipates and it moistens, it changes into water.<sup>10</sup> The resulting elements are also called Mothers (*ummahāt*).<sup>11</sup> These two terms, Fathers and Mothers, are metaphor for the interaction between the revolutions of the spheres and the effects of their combined movements on the mixing of the elements. What is thus conceived are the “offspring” (*mawālīd*) or kingdoms: mineral, vegetable, and animal.<sup>12</sup>

For the most part these theories about nature are a feature of the common scientific knowledge of al-Sijistānī’s time. In this subject he recognizes what he calls the Physicists (*al-Ṭabīʿīyūn*) whose views support his, except in so far as they tend to hold that the physical world is itself eternal and without a Maker. The Physicists, according to him, saw no way that the gross, solid body which is made up by the compounding of the elements in various proportions could have its origin in a simple and sublime, higher spiritual realm.<sup>13</sup> How could the world of intellect and soul produce a world of body and space? This question obviously perplexed al-Sijistānī and he devoted a chapter of his *al-Maqālīd* to answering it but without convincing success.<sup>14</sup> There as elsewhere in his books he confesses that certain of these issues are complex and impossibly obscure.<sup>15</sup>

Nature is the world of compounding (*tarkīb*) and everything in it is a mixture, a compound, a synthetic product. That is why it is also transitory and never permanent. The opposite condition is the “simple.” The Arabic term is *basīṭ* and here it means uncompounded or unmixed or, perhaps, pure, with the sense of

being absolutely or unqualifiedly pure, also of being ideally simple. Moving down the scale of being is to become increasingly synthetic, more compounded and complex. Another way he puts it suggests that descending means to become "narrower in substance," that is, more restricted in substance.<sup>16</sup> Each step downward increases the complexity of reality. One key stage, for example, is the transition from three features to four – that is, from quantity (*kammīya*) to quality (*kayfīya*): the simpler consists of length, breadth, and width only, whereas the second consists of the four natures hot, cold, wet, and dry.<sup>17</sup>

Still, in all that al-Sijistānī has to say about it, it is hard to grasp a concept of what nature itself is. At least once he does use the term "universal nature" (*al-ṭabī'a al-kullīya*)<sup>18</sup> and he speaks also of the "governance of nature" (*tadbīr al-ṭabī'a*)<sup>19</sup> but what either of these concepts mean he leaves vague. Nevertheless there is no doubt that nature, in his mind, possesses certain hypostatic qualities. It is more than the sum of the corporeal beings.

In yet another context he might offer a mechanical explanation such as the following: the soul is the cause of natural motions and, on their account, circular motion comes-to-be in the spherical body that encompasses the whole of the corporeal beings which are in turn arrayed in their respective positions and thus due to its motion there come-into-being differences within the natural realm.<sup>20</sup> The motions of the various celestial spheres create variation in the mixing and compounding of the elements. As a consequence difference and disparity come to exist in the product of this mixing. This allows the production of individuals; presumably each particular corporeal being is unique because the exact configuration of constantly moving celestial factors determines its precise nature. All things thus possess disparate qualities; none are alike in every detail.<sup>21</sup>

Though the motions of the spheres give rise to uncertainty and difference in the world influenced by them, they act, al-Sijistānī maintains, by the preordained desire of soul.<sup>22</sup> Here there is a troublesome contradiction. The work of nature, according to him, proceeds by chance (*bakht*) and not design.<sup>23</sup> How else would diversity among terrestrial things occur? Yet nature is infused throughout with rationality. Soul receives the instruction of reason even while participating in physical activity and she therefore orders nature according to an intelligent model.<sup>24</sup> Nature in turn is an incarnation of intellectual benefits (*al-fawā'id al-'aqlīya al-mujassama*).<sup>25</sup> Thus it is, on the one hand, the scene of novelty and disparity that are both alien to intelligibility and is, on the other hand, governed by timeless reason in the person of soul. Al-Sijistānī did not succeed in bridging this gap.

The major problem in the whole scheme – one which lurks behind his combination of such scientific ideas with the language of traditional religion – is temporal creation. Creation, in religious terms, is supposed to take place in time and, in the theory of al-Sijistānī, it does, although for him time itself exists only within soul. Therefore, the only concept al-Sijistānī can propose of a temporal creation lies in the way nature operates as it brings into being a new physical world



out of a pre-existing physical world. True, this is creation – and it does follow a temporal mode – but it is not *ex nihilo* (*lā min shay'*). That, as already explained, is an act of God and God alone. Nature creates in time; God “originates” outside of time. But the latter form of creation is not temporal in any sense.

There is an especially clear-cut example of this problem and its implications in a chapter of *al-Yanābī'*. In it al-Sijistānī reviews the question of how man was created.<sup>26</sup> He rejects the concept that man, as a species, began with a single individual and multiplied through procreation. For him mankind was created all at once (*daf'atan wāhidatan*). This is to say, the species “man” was created at the originating in intellect of an archetype of mankind, which is the formal cause of all human beings. Individual, particular men come into being and disappear within the physical world in an endless sequence since the motion of nature has no end.<sup>27</sup> The series father and son or chicken and egg is, as Philosophers had said, without beginning and without end. Its causes, however, are indeed finite. Therefore, al-Sijistānī, under scrutiny, offers a view of creation remarkably similar to that of Ibn Sīnā and the *falāsifa* in general. The totality of all existing beings is limited but this only implies that discrete individuals do not themselves constitute these beings. A single human being does not define mankind.<sup>28</sup>

The doctrine that men are now exactly as they have always been, which is to say, that the species mankind does not change or evolve, is possible only in a static universe. In fact nothing in nature undergoes change. Al-Sijistānī says that there is nothing now existing that will not exist in the same manner in the future.<sup>29</sup> In such a universe the totality of things must remain the same, although individual items in it may undergo cycles of decline and emergence.<sup>30</sup> This is an axiom of Greek, Neoplatonic thinking and its logic is an inherent feature of al-Sijistānī's pronouncements on this as well as other issues.

That perspective on nature and the universe does not, however, account in any way for the intense historicism that is another characteristic but conflicting feature in al-Sijistānī's thinking. As a theologian of the Ismaili version of Shiism, he was devoted to the concept of historical prophecy and to the progressive – that is, evolutionary – unfolding of revelation. Revelation began with Adam and will end with the Messiah. Each of the five lawgiving prophets, who dominate the eras between, add a new element to the essence of the message brought by the one before. Al-Sijistānī may argue that the spiritual reality of that message is eternal and therefore has suffered no alteration or change but it is fair nevertheless to wonder if nature itself, or the particular nature of certain historical men, does not undergo change. Is it only that the later ones possess an increased perception of the truth?

Ultimately, for him, mankind, or at least a portion of it, will be delivered from physical bondage upon emerging into a spiritual paradise. The form of man that now lies hidden and invisible within the body will at that moment take on its permanent manifestation. The body will disappear, decay and corrupt into its constituent elements. Nature itself is ultimately only a curtain which not only hides the spiritual form of man, but causes a barrier to exist between true reality

and a false and deceptive exterior that has become its mask. Nature conceals knowledge. In one passage al-Sijistānī explains this as follows:

When the powers of nature gain ascendancy over the powers of the soul, the radiance of soul lessens and the delights of nature multiply. Then a curtain falls between man and knowledge. Thus during that time mankind needs the institution of laws and sacred codes, concealed within which are truth and science, so that by employing these laws he will obtain nobility, high rank, brilliance, joy, power, dominion, and equanimity.<sup>31</sup>

When soul regains control and the power of nature subsides, this curtain will be lifted.

In sum nature presents a dual aspect in al-Sijistānī's thought. On the one hand, it is the marvelous product of soul's handiwork, where the rules of rational organization are incorporated in bodily form and the physical law. Soul brings the benefits of intellect into the natural, physical realm and applies them in her artisanship. And yet, on the other hand, nature is impermanent, transitory, and always in a state of flux. It conceals reality and the true being of things thus suffers an invisible existence behind its masking deceptions. Nevertheless, nature itself is not an evil force but is rather a gross imperfection as compared to the spiritual world of intellectual life. Realization of this fact brings about the search for those who can lead the way into that other, more perfect realm, by providing a correct perception of the essentially flawed reality of nature and its world.

## A cosmic anthropology

The human species occupies a position at the very top of the terrestrial realm because it is the culmination of the whole physical world. All earthly existence precedes man and leads to man. The minerals yield to plants which support animals but all finally reach their crowning purpose in the rational animal which is humanity itself. In turn man defines both the summation of physical existence and the advent of spirituality within the natural universe.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as the focus of the whole, mankind is also a model of it in the sense of being a microcosm, the *al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr*. The whole of creation is absorbed in him to the point that nothing is left out.<sup>2</sup> In this he is more than a representative of nature and physical beings since he also contains additional factors that prefigure the whole of spiritual and intelligible existence as well.

Nature has an intimate relationship to man and in a limited way man depends on nature, but the ultimate end of each is radically different. On the relative performance of each, al-Sijistānī offers an interesting comparison. Man, he says, possesses the ability to produce a better form than nature can, but he lacks the capacity to provide his product a finer action.<sup>3</sup> Al-Sijistānī's anthropology recognizes nature as a necessary base for human life and therefore readily admits the human nature in man. Still ideally, nature serves mankind and not the other way around. Human skill and artistry should make of nature a tool toward a higher purpose – a purpose that transcends nature altogether.

As with earlier themes that provided him with legitimate opportunities for the combination of Neoplatonism and Islamic religious tradition, in what follows about mankind, Greek philosophical ideas continue to have a central place. The concept of a return or an upward path leading mankind from a natural and physical existence to one that is purely spiritual is certainly common both to Neoplatonic speculation and to the demands of religious dogma and therefore, salvation and the restoration of the soul's proper upward orientation might be discussed using teachings from either the *Theologia* or from the *Qur'ān* or both. Running against Neoplatonic thinking in the case at hand, however, is a distinctively historical pattern that the Ismailis add to their conception of the road from one realm to the other. As the abode of her escapade in the physical world prior to the return back to her higher self, mankind occupies a stage both in the

descent and ascent of soul. Yet the human species is also an organism with a potentiality for eternal permanence, if and when it achieves full knowledge or complete benefit of intellect. In one sense – the Neoplatonic one – this creates a vertical scale where all values of great significance in it are at the upper end. They are thus timeless and static, never changing, fixed and immobile, and therefore contain no reference and have no connection to historical incidents. Since there is no history in the realm of pure thought, intellect remains perpetually unaffected by the events or developments of a past time. Instead intellectual values constitute a timeless, synchronic measure of rank and status. In al-Sijistānī's thought, however, and that of the Ismailis in general, beside this there is a pronouncedly historical view of the unfolding of human social development. Revelation itself has a history and consequently so does man's understanding of reality and ultimate truth. A Neoplatonic scheme has no place for temporal development; there is no historical dimension to the soul's involvement with the body, and no collective, temporal improvement for religious society. But in Ismaili Shiism, history is a major force and a concept so fundamental that the differences between the historical and the synchronic vision of cosmic events engender two, seemingly conflicting views of man.

Unlike al-Sijistānī's description of the higher world previously, with the subject of man as a social animal he must pursue a course less and less compatible with classical Neoplatonism. On the issue of creation, he abandoned history in favor of atemporal "origination" and thus adhered to a philosophical view, whereas on the question of prophecy and salvation he must in part reverse sides and therefore these issues involve him in a new kind of dilemma. In contrast to some theologians who are content merely to validate a concept of prophecy that concedes only that man both needs and receives revelation as delivered through a messenger who acts as the conduit for God's word within human society, al-Sijistānī adds to prophecy the sacred facts of man's historical existence and development. Prophecy defines history; man's position in the cosmos is temporal; and humanity has therefore a diachronic meaning, as well as a synchronic one.

Thus man's situation is complex in several senses not explained solely by his natural position in the physical universe. First, the human being represents nearly all forms of existence, save God. He is therefore a microcosm of the entire universe because he participates to one degree or another in all phases of it, both in its corporeal and in its spiritual aspects. Second, man alone in the lower, corporeal world has the benefit, or potential benefit of acquired rationality when his particular soul grasps the primary intelligibles and begins to comprehend ultimate reality and truth. In so doing he becomes a permanent, self-subsisting being and commences the manifestation of his sublime or spiritual form.<sup>4</sup> Third, the particularity of each man places him in an historical movement which depends on the special, unique factors of time and place. Human character responds to the various exigencies of climate, culture and society.<sup>5</sup> In other words because he is both a rational *and* a physical being, there are peculiar restrictions to his existence that follow from the circumstances of the latter condition. Without proper

attention to the rules and requirements of his physical existence – those imposed by the conditions of time and place – he cannot attain the perfection of either his physical *or* his rational self. Religious obligation is then a law that must be applied, not only in order to orient each individual to the higher values on the vertical scale, but to his position with respect to the historical one as well. Individual humans must each understand time and know both where and when they are because what a person does with that information determines whether he accedes to the fullest authority and the best instruction available to him. This is the path – the only true path – to the permanent improvement of his soul and the achievement of enduring spiritual existence.

One concept looming exceptionally large in al-Sijistānī's view of the structure of physical reality is the doctrine of "disparity" – *tafāwut* in Arabic.<sup>6</sup> His most thorough and detailed account of this doctrine comes, significantly, in the opening section of his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*. Essential to the creation and maintenance of the vertical organization of the lower world, a kind of differential disparity automatically determines the place of everything in it. All things belong to groupings which are structured and organized by the principle that some are inherently better than others. A differential disparity exists in every thing and this imposes a distinctive order on all beings outside of God and the intellect.

A direct result of such disparity is, therefore, hierarchy. He says,

we say that God . . . joins things some to others and makes some of them conquerors and others conquered, some contributors and others receivers, some leaders and others followers, and some apostles and others listeners.<sup>7</sup>

Each individual and each species in fact belongs to an array of hierarchies; no two participants are exactly alike. All possess a differential degree of disparity and fall therefore into natural categories of superiority or inferiority. The action of the celestial spheres with their different individual motions causes the elements, not only to mix in various ways to create species, but also to make individuals within those species having different and disparate qualities. Generically, according to al-Sijistānī's account, among stones, for example, the best is the red ruby; of fusible materials, gold; of seed-plants, wheat; of fruit trees, the date palm; of animals, man; and of humans, the messenger-prophet.<sup>8</sup> The key to understanding the cosmos, for him, is knowledge of each particular thing's exact place in the hierarchies to which it belongs. Because of the disparity, literally, "the affairs of the two worlds stand in order."<sup>9</sup>

A corollary to this doctrine acknowledges that each person likewise belongs within a similar classification. Individual temperament and situation differ; all humans fall into hierarchies created by these personal disparities.<sup>10</sup>

This doctrine of hierarchy surely constitutes the most fundamental of all Ismaili teachings.<sup>11</sup> It yields, for example, the concept of *da'wa* as a religious institution that implies much more than the idea of a call or appeal for the acceptance of truer Islam. For the Ismailis the whole universe is hierarchically organized. Their critical term is *ḥudūd* (singular *ḥadd*), a word itself meaning to delineate or mark

off, implying limits and degrees, indicating in all probability a concept of ranks that are fixed and defined by boundaries, a hierarchy not fluid or evolutionary but structured as an edifice.

Within the lower portion of this edifice, each species comes-to-be for the sake of the species above it. The general scheme runs as follows: minerals for plants; plants for animals; animals for mankind. Man, however, as the crux of the world of nature, which is by definition the realm of substance and nine accidents, begins another world which is his alone. This is the human soul: a culmination of vegetative, then animate, and finally rational soul. Its ten functions are the five external and five internal senses.<sup>12</sup> Above this world, since man himself is a microcosm of the natural universe and thus contains to a degree something of all of it, there is nothing possessing greater nobility. Mankind is best in formation and in composition.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, another world exists that controls and determines the moral character of man and the other worlds represented in him. Unlike other creatures, he is capable of choosing either the good or the bad – that is, of voluntarily turning in one direction or its opposite. And while it is true that intellect innately supplies the means by which a human makes these choices, there are features of man's centrality within creation that require here a further imposition. Man has a responsibility for his choices in matters where choice is possible. This moral responsibility is, moreover, not internal but external. Sacred law recognizes in him legal capacitation and with it responsibility for the fulfillment of the divine commandment because he, alone among physical creation, possesses the virtue of rationality. Intellectual gifts make correct choices possible and also necessary.

Unlike ancient Stoicism, which held that living according to the truth means to follow the natural order, al-Sijistānī's teachings do not ask for an adjustment by the individual to a form of natural law. Given his concept of hypostatic nature and a physical world that is itself intellect incarnate, this result might follow from his philosophical view. Instead of that, however, he demands allegiance to the specific normative decrees of God's appointed religious hierarchy. This is what he calls the "normative" or "statutory" world – in Arabic the *'ālam al-waḍ'* (or *al-'ālam al-waḍ'i*). In this then he recognizes a third realm – another world – over and above those of nature or soul alone.<sup>14</sup>

As a world for man alone, the "statutory world" regulates the affairs of mankind by imposing on him "legal rule" (*siyāsa nāmūsīya*) – that is, the rule of covenant law.<sup>15</sup> A special hierarchy, parallel to but distinct from the other hierarchies, conveys this law. The statutory world matches the hierarchy of created beings in its first two ranks. Thus the Two Roots (*aṣṣlān*) for both are intellect and soul. But the third, fourth and fifth ranks in the statutory hierarchy are the angels Jadd, Faṭḥ, and Khayāl – all three of whom have specific functions vis à vis the prophet, but not man in general. Further down in the terrestrial realm, the highest members of the religious institution or ecclesiastical body hold ranks said to be parallel to these. In order they are the lawgiving prophet (*nāṭiq*), the Founder (*asās*), the imam (or *mutimm*), the Adjuncts (*lawāḥiq*), and the Wings

(*ajniha*). Law is religion (*dīn*) itself – the '*ālam al-waḍ'*' is the '*ālam al-dīn*' – and these earthly authorities are charged thus with the implementation and preservation of religious faith and man's adherence to it.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this moral imperative, or rather because of it, man clearly occupies more than a simple stage in the upward or downward path of soul. His role in the cosmos, either synchronically or diachronically, is a pivot about which everything else turns. For al-Sijistānī, "of all creatures in this world susceptible to differential disparity, man is the most excellent."<sup>17</sup> To demonstrate this fully he offers, in a remarkable chapter of his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, an outline of seven divisions of the particular excellences of man over other creatures and lists in each division seven branches. The whole is impressive testimony to the abundant virtues of mankind, as derived from the following human functions: cognizance of the Originator, speculative reasoning, ethical discrimination, organic harmony of physical composition, sound governance, reception of prophetic favor, and the achievement of permanence.<sup>18</sup>

The addition of a moral or legal component to the ultimate structure of the universe means that certain facets of it possess a normative (*waḍ'i*) quality as well as an intellective (*'aqlī*) one. Technically, in dealing with the vertical, synchronic vision of reality, this element enters at one stage only, that of man, and would apply only to single humans individually. The other dimension, however, is historical and proceeds along a diachronic scale in a horizontal fashion. In this the normative values of the former are not merely imposed by simple fiat from top to bottom but in contrast undergo a kind of progressive unfolding and incremental perfection.

The basic principle is as follows: events in the terrestrial world take place according to the celestial forces that control them. The composition and temperament of particular individuals within a given species depend, therefore, on the specific circumstances of the rising, falling, ascendancy and eclipse of the celestial bodies at different times. In the physical realm the law – which is to say religion – must accord with the changing situations within it. The primary disposition of religion is, after all, to regulate human activity in a terrestrial situation.

The history of natural man, both as species<sup>19</sup> and as a sequence of individual men, falls into temporal cycles. That cycle which includes the history of those men known to us began in some way or another with the advent of Adam, who initiated the era of the speaker-prophets for the current period. Adam's function was to commence a grand cycle during which truth and observable reality do not precisely coincide. In other words, the information supplied by the sensory activities of the human in that era does not indicate the pure truth but rather, in nearly every case, serves to conceal it by false reporting. The knowledge of most men, therefore, which depends entirely on sense impressions, is of a superficial sort, lacking accuracy, permanence, and demonstration in reason. In terms of religion – that is, of sacred obligation and law – what is apparent symbolizes an inner meaning and true reality but only by secondary signification that necessarily

conceals what lies behind it. The age begun by Adam is, therefore, called the Era of Concealment (*dawr al-satr*).

That the senses yield untrustworthy data is an axiom of Greek thought as well and to argue that there is a veil over physical reality that masks its true nature is not surprising philosophically. Equally, it is not uncommon to argue that reason and the rational soul provide an exclusive avenue to genuine truth. But a most significant question is how the observable facts relate to the hidden, explanatory truth behind them. If it is agreed that the outward, *ẓāhirī* data of either physical reality or scripture is dark glass, is there, nevertheless, a way to see through it or not? Al-Sijistānī, for whom this is a religious as well as a philosophical problem, does not supply a simple answer. Suffice it to say that he does not regard this problem as merely an exercise in epistemology. For him the key to the concealed knowledge is kept by a particular set of guardians who have been commissioned by God to watch over truth and selectively and progressively to propagate its cultivation among the righteous.

Adam was the first of these guardians because he also began the cycle in which truth was so-to-speak separated from observable reality by the imposition of a curtain between them. Is Adam, therefore, the first of men because he is the first person to confront this condition? After all his coming did result in the imposition of a rudimentary form of law. But this is also said by al-Sijistānī to be true of the natural realm as a whole. Do these two events coincide – the coming of Adam and the beginning of physical existence? This is what al-Sijistānī implies, although he would also seem to deny that Adam is the first man since he resolutely denies that mankind began with a single individual. Adam was not the first man from whom the rest descended but rather the first apostle from God to the human race.<sup>20</sup> This insoluble problem results from the conflict between al-Sijistānī's synchronic, emanative hierarchy and his diachronic view of history.

What can be said with greater clarity about Adam is that, for al-Sijistānī, the advent of Adam is not connected to a dramatic "fall" occasioned by celestial rebellion and exile. Myth occupies a relatively minor role in al-Sijistānī's account of man and his place in the cosmos. Rather Adam commenced the period of concealment – an event understood in al-Sijistānī's matter of fact way as a concealment actually almost devoid of mystery. It is simply a scientifically self-evident condition of that world in which man finds himself. If it were not so, law and hence religion might otherwise be unnecessary. However, truth is not directly perceptible under the current conditions of man's terrestrial existence and therefore he remains currently under the rule of that law.

Nor – and this is important as an additional factor – does the truth become accessible, except in small doses to highly learned authorities. Divinely appointed messengers alone penetrate the world of intellect to its ultimate. Other, ordinary men cannot do this. These inspired individuals also translate rationality into physical obligation and scripture and this happens not once in each generation of men but rather once in each millennium. When it does, another messenger succeeds the former one and annuls or abrogates a portion of the previous law,



replacing it with a better and more comprehensive version. History leads upward and the human community follows. Prophets in fact decorate time by naming the successive ages and all of them point forward to the final restoration of an era without law when the truth will no longer be concealed in its physical shell and garb. Thereupon mankind will emerge from the womb of history and accede to the world of higher soul and of intellect.

## Prophecy, the deputy of intellect

In contrast to many Shiite writers of his period, al-Sijistānī tends to avoid the subject of the imamate as an institution by itself. Apparently, his major concerns did not include the question of who does or does not have the right to lead the Muslim community at a specific moment. This heatedly debated topic has little space in his surviving treatises and such an immediately political issue involves a kind of polemic that might seem foreign to the lofty philosophical themes he is more apt to pursue.<sup>1</sup> In place of arguments about the right to the imamate, he offers a theoretical discussion of prophecy itself, concentrating his attention, therefore, on the general question of the prophetic role in cosmic rather than political terms.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other themes considered in this study, al-Sijistānī composed an entire volume on this one subject.

Among prophecy's major philosophical problems, perhaps the most serious for al-Sijistānī, given his wish to reconcile a dogma of revelation with Neoplatonic philosophy, is why it should have been necessary for there to be more than one prophet and, if more than one, why an intermittently repeating series of them? Why if the imposition of law is a corollary of physical existence, as explained in the previous chapter, does the promulgation of that legal system need to be renewed or changed? Why not a single scripture and a single sacred law?

This problem, of course, reintroduces the issue of the meaning and importance of history. A philosophical definition of what a prophet does is possible with or without history, but it generally appears easier to obtain without taking history into consideration. As an agency that transfers information from a realm of timeless eternity to another realm of temporal change and flux, Plotinus and the Neoplatonist well understood this role and thus foresaw that person al-Sijistānī will call "the deputy of intellect in the physical world." The Greeks attribute such a function simply to philosophers. For the Muslim Neoplatonists, however, this person must be a prophet and only a prophet (or someone possessing a degree of prophetic power).

By adding an historical dimension to this agency, with the concomitant uncertainty of the relationship between one era of specific prophecy and another, the Ismailis threatened to nullify, or at least inextricably complicate, the logic that allowed for the privileged position of a single prophet. They had carried this even

further in declaring that there have been exactly six great prophets and that the law promulgated by each one retains its definitive constitutional authority exclusively among each legislating prophet's designated lineal descendants. The prophet thus is an historical creature,<sup>3</sup> his function occupies a specific moment of time and, as a corollary, inevitably such a role must be repeated in each new era.<sup>4</sup> "Each of the prophets," declares al-Sijistānī, "differs in his rule and his law because of his time, his place and the people to whom he was sent."<sup>5</sup>

That al-Sijistānī also hopes to signify law in the broadest terms, which might therefore cover both Greek concepts and Semitic revelatory traditions, is demonstrated by his frequent use of the neutral word *nāmūs*.<sup>6</sup> This is a Greek word in Arabic transliteration and thus cannot be as narrowly understood as the Islamic term *sharī'a* might be. Occasionally, al-Sijistānī employs the two side by side, as if thinking of it in a restricted sense. But he also creates an even less specific language by speaking of the *wāḍī'*, the "legislator," or *wāḍī' al-awḍā'*, the "legislator of statutes" or the "progenitor of laws."<sup>7</sup> As with other subjects already discussed, al-Sijistānī's language in this instance is at once highly technical, as if philosophical, and yet extremely attuned to nuances of religious meaning. Unlike a Philosopher, such as his contemporary al-Fārābī, from whom he may have taken the philosophical language, who had searched for a special denaturalized discourse with which to explain prophecy without reference to one or another of the specific traditions, al-Sijistānī wants to have it both ways. He requires both an abstract and a particular language because his purpose is to amalgamate, not only Greek philosophy with revelation, but perhaps even more importantly, to synthesize in the process the entire history of Semitic prophecy and religious thought. For him all six of the speaker-prophets, the *nāṭiqs*, were sent to convey a single, unified message, although each of them was forced to translate that message to fit particular circumstances of time, place, local language, and exigencies of a specific social group.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Sijistānī's task then is, in part, to explain how theoretical truth can be made into code, how the abstract can be turned into concrete language and symbol, and how rational knowledge becomes verbal sounds and scripture – in other words how intellect enters the discourse of a human society living an earthly existence. But more than this al-Sijistānī must also emphasize the necessity of a particular law above all others, not just because its expressions hew closer to invisible reason, which they do, but because it is the seal of a series of God's messages, each of which have confirmed, added to, and canceled those that precede. This final step perfects a long process that ultimately brings mankind properly to appreciate the awesome transcendent splendor of God and thereby to arrive at true religion.<sup>9</sup>

Given both the scope and the importance of this subject and therefore its complexity, a range of special vocabulary is necessary to explain various aspects of it. First of all distinctions are required to mark off various gradations of prophecy. *Nubūwa* is the general Arabic term for prophecy, but this word, from which comes the common expression for prophet, *nabī*, refers in Ismaili literature

to a relatively vast number of persons, including the imams who participate in prophecy to a certain limited degree.<sup>10</sup> *Nabī* applies to anyone who holds a divine appointment to a position of religious leadership and who therefore has access to privileged or sacred information. These need not be lawgivers. Of those mentioned in the *Qur'ān*, only five are legislators. All others are Founders (*asās*), imams, or Adjuncts (*lawāḥiq*).<sup>11</sup> Those few prophets who bear the divine nomination to the role of legislator, who are one of these *wāḍi' al-nawāmis*, are the great figures of the historical past each of whom contributed one of the major religions. The specifically Ismaili term for them is *nāṭiq* or speaker-prophet, which is to say, someone with a voice to enunciate the principles of religion in the form of scripture. Thus, in dealing with the subject of prophecy in precise terms, al-Sijistānī modifies the language he uses to reflect subtlety often neglected by those less concerned with his concepts of rank and hierarchy.

One of the problems connected with the term *nāṭiq* concerns Adam, who by and large was thought not to have brought a law, at least not one in the form of scripture or code.<sup>12</sup> But he did institute the worship of the One, True God, and perhaps other matters having religious import. It is he after all who created language and first named things. Naming is closely related to legislating.<sup>13</sup> The word *nāṭiq* conveys this fine distinction better than *wāḍi'*, or "lawgiver."

Another factor involves the necessity of explaining how that particular religion engendered by each *nāṭiq* endures beyond the specific life of its founder. Two functions must remain in effect. One involves preserving the literal and verbal authority of the scripture and the other, as put in motion by the *nāṭiq*'s Founder, the *asās*, insures the continuation of its definitive interpretation. Both "Founders" – the *nāṭiq* and the *asās* – must provide for the continuity of the faith they create. In large measure such continuity is a function of institutionalization related to the meaning of the lawgiver's utterances. These prophets were not merely personally inspired with great wisdom but with an ability to legislate that wisdom into words and symbols having almost as powerful a subsequent role as they once had themselves personally. The laws (*sharā'i'*) become surrogates of the speaker-prophets and the proof of prophecy resides in the overwhelming efficacy of that law, even in the absence of the prophet who created it. The law of a true prophet does not cease when he disappears.<sup>14</sup>

"Observe," al-Sijistānī comments in a passage of his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*,

the effects of prophecy, how they remain after the architect of the religion departs from the world, how they affect souls even when their creator is not present. Indeed the people active after the architect of the religion has departed from the world have impressed upon their soul the acceptability of his religion in greater measure than in the souls of those who had direct witness of him and likewise its effect on the souls of the third century is greater than the second.<sup>15</sup>

The sacred activity of prophecy has two areas of great interest for al-Sijistānī: one involves questions about the person and the other about the message. The concept of prophet as emissary is critical in both. A basic, standard function of

prophecy is to convey divine knowledge to humanity. But, if that were the sole stipulation of prophecy, why not argue that all outstanding scientists and philosophers are, in fact, prophets – an idea that would easily accommodate Neoplatonic doctrine. Why add, as al-Sijistānī does, the stipulations that there can be only one prophet at a time,<sup>16</sup> that some nations have never had any at all,<sup>17</sup> and most important of all that prophecy belongs to what amounts almost to a separate, superior species.<sup>18</sup>

The classical definition of man is “rational, mortal animal” (*ḥayy nāṭiq mayyit*). In distinction to this, the prophet is an “inspired, rational animal” (*ḥayy nāṭiq mu'ayyad*).<sup>19</sup> For al-Sijistānī, there are four categories of soul: vegetative, animate, rational, and sacred. Prophets are unique in possessing this fourth kind of soul: the “sacred soul” or “holy soul” (*al-naḥs al-qudsīya*).<sup>20</sup> Their degree of superiority over mankind comes from having *quds*.<sup>21</sup> To employ a more complete expression, the prophet is, in his words, “that pure man who is inspired with the holy spirit.” The key phrase is *mu'ayyad bi-rūḥ al-quds*.<sup>22</sup> Al-Sijistānī explains,

Whoever obtained perfect repose his reception of its (intellect's) benefits (*fawā'id*) was achieved in such a complete and perfect manner that there is in it no variation or cessation. Such persons are the “inspired” (*al-mu'ayyadūn*) of God.<sup>23</sup>

Terms such as *mu'ayyad* and *ta'yīd* which derive from the verb *'ayyada* depend on two verses from the *Qur'ān* (2: 87 and 253) in which God says about Jesus, “We inspired him with the Holy Spirit.” Al-Sijistānī is quite specific about this.<sup>24</sup> His concept then must somehow be analogous to a Christian notion, not of a filial relationship between God and Jesus which Muslims reject, but of an indwelling or infusion (almost incarnation) of the Holy Spirit in the person of the prophet.

What then is the Holy Spirit and what does it mean to speak of *ta'yīd* – the verbal noun for the action of “inspiring”? And also who are the recipients of this *ta'yīd*? The Holy Spirit is, in al-Sijistānī's understanding, identical with perfect intellection. The capacity to penetrate the world of intellect, to rise there and see it in its entirety without having to fall back again, to comprehend without physical aids or distractions, that is “inspiration” and to have this gift to be *mu'ayyad*. The Holy Spirit is really intellect and intellect is the angel called the *rūḥ al-quds*.<sup>25</sup> Prophets – here referring probably only to the *nāṭiqs* – see (*'āyanū*) the sublime world.<sup>26</sup> “They rise to the sublime world through their pure souls and take from it spiritual refinements and luminous delights which they bear to other creatures.”<sup>27</sup> They converse with the angels,<sup>28</sup> and read the “book of the heavens.”<sup>29</sup> They alone reveal the unseen, the *ghayb*.<sup>30</sup> They are, in fact, the deputies of intellect in the mundane world. Al-Sijistānī's exact phrase is “deputy (*khalīfa*) of the Preceder (*al-sābiq*) in the physical world.”<sup>31</sup>

A standard idea of prophecy in Islam implies knowing the unseen, the *ghayb*, and of being able to place everything in its proper place and context, to command unerringly only the good and prohibit only evil. In al-Sijistānī's view these are possible because the person so endowed has benefit of the timeless world of

intellect. Without this the certainty that these descriptions indicate would not be present in the prophet's mind.

In speaking about these functions of prophecy it is difficult to separate which of them applies to which grade of prophecy, because *ta'yīd*, the inspiration and divine support, reaches beyond the speaking-prophets to encompass the Founder, *asās*, as well as other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>32</sup>

An essential element of this office is easily missed. While all human beings acquire knowledge through their senses, such knowledge is inevitably transitory, impermanent, and largely inaccurate. Many learned persons find ways and means, in addition to this, to leave aside the data supplied by the senses and, having done so, to begin to penetrate the realm of pure intellect, to one degree or another. A part of what ultimately distinguishes even the most remarkable of these scholars from those who are truly "inspired" is the method each uses to preserve or store the knowledge thus acquired. Ordinary humans must rely on signs, symbols, and language for the preservation and retrieval of even the most abstract of their individual discoveries. Because they exist in a physical world and in a natural body, they have no choice but to convert their knowledge into its language and forms of communication, even for their personal use.<sup>33</sup>

The prophet does this too, of course, since he shares with all human beings the mortal, physical form they have in common.<sup>34</sup> A prophet's own temperament and constitution are, however, of such perfect harmony, equilibrium, and sublimity that internal conflicts do not obstruct the absolute tranquillity necessary for the total infusion of intellect.<sup>35</sup> A prophet does not need to convert knowledge from its simple concentrated intellectual purity into a discursive system in order to store or retrieve it. Because it is accessible to him directly, without mediation, therefore the prophet is the perfect, infallible representative of intellect in the physical world.

The difference between these two modes of intellectual activity – the one simple and concentrated, and the other discursive and manifold – mirror the distinction separating intellect and soul. At the upper level the prophets function as the intellect does, without reference to time, place or particularity. But when their role requires them to translate what they know and perceive of intelligible reality into a physical language for the benefit of others, then their activity more closely approximates that of soul.

However philosophically al-Sijistānī would have hoped to explain this theory of prophecy, it was all but impossible for him to avoid declaring that the prophets are a special race both physically and mentally.<sup>36</sup> In part this is his answer to the problem of why the emanating effect of the single universal intellect falls differentially on a very few individual men with such a profound result. His doctrine is not unlike that of Ibn Sīnā, who seems to differ from al-Fārābī in this regard.<sup>37</sup> Al-Sijistānī's position is even more limited than that of the Philosophers, however. For him the prophets, in fact, all come from a single lineage.<sup>38</sup> They belong to a "species" (*naw'*) which cannot be crossed.<sup>39</sup>

And their superiority over ordinary men results in a form of domination, but not

by creating classes as in the rule of kings or by force or other ordinary techniques used for subjugation.<sup>40</sup> The job of the prophet, al-Sijistānī remarks in his *al-Maqālīd*, is “the ending of warfare, of killing, of the shedding of blood, the plundering of wealth and the taking of captives.”<sup>41</sup> His hold on those who follow him comes from the power of his words and the devotion aroused by the nature of his command of language. He explains this thought as follows: All created things have a core that represents its best. Man is the cream of all animals because of his ability to speak. The cream or the essence of mankind then is speech.<sup>42</sup>

The speech of all men as uttered in a single epoch is comparable to milk drawn from a cow. If it is put in a leather bag and churned, its butter may be extracted. The speech of men in a single epoch, because of its subtlety, does not admit to comprehension by only one individual except the prophet on whose tongue it flows with ease. Men in that epoch accept his prophethood because his speech finds a place in their hearts since it is the “butter” of all they have said themselves and hence is pleasing to their ears for it has the same intonations as their own.<sup>43</sup>

In another place he states a similar point:

His words have such power, prestige, sweetness and fertility no one else among those who share the same language or speak the same tongue can produce anything like them. Having importance and currency at all times and places, his words come to dominate every discourse.<sup>44</sup>

The speech of prophets silences the wise and the stupid equally.<sup>45</sup> Rather than suffering from the temporal or physical absence of the speaker, their words increase in effectiveness with time and distance. “His words uncover the unseen, and even if he is not present, their effect is not lost.”<sup>46</sup> And stand every test like a coin of pure gold: false prophets resemble a counterfeit coin that blackens with tarnish when passed through fire.<sup>47</sup>

The prophet, therefore, possesses unique powers or rather a complex of powers. For the Ismailis these were, in part, symbolized by the angels *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*. *Jadd* is good fortune, the lucky circumstance that raises those few chosen, “pure souls” (*nafs zakīya*) to spiritual wealth and religious kingship. Al-Sijistānī, and perhaps the rest of the Ismailis, seem to offer no claim of preordination other than lineage. The prophet receives the call to prophethood little by little, rising within the hierarchy.<sup>48</sup> The result of *jadd* leads to an intuitive “opening” for the revelatory infusion of intellect. The Arabic word *fath* (opening) in this context describes the condition in the individual that allows the message to be received. The final step, *khayāl*, insures that the message will continue to be nurtured and cherished. *Khayāl* is a form of prophetic vision that enables the prophet to select the proper person to execute his legacy and thus provide for the continuation of his mission. As al-Sijistānī treats them, these three angels are, therefore, symbolic elements of what constitutes the religious personality of the lawgiving prophet.<sup>49</sup>

A further critical point about prophets involves the earlier question of agency and responsibility. Most forms of Islam argue that a prophet merely conveys

God's message. The Arabic term *rasūl* (messenger, emissary) – another standard word for prophet – suggests exactly this and perhaps nothing more. By emphasizing the message at the expense of the messenger, the importance of a prophet's intellectual inspiration and any associated personal agency would be reduced sharply. A prophet, in this view, does not act on his own nor does he have a particular role in the creation of scripture, beyond that of being proximate or intimate with it, which role is inherent in having been the first to receive it from the angel. Such ideas, however, although often voiced in Islam, were not sanctioned by the Ismailis. The lawgiving prophets, for them, were actually responsible for the outward form of each particular law, even though its concealed content remains divine. Intellect is the divine source, but the laws are the work of individual speaker-prophets. The codification of Mosaic law was an act of Moses, even though what it tries to express is symbolic of an eternal, unchanging reality that is common behind all scriptural representations of the world of intellect.<sup>50</sup> The prophets cause the appearance of "intellectual emanations" in earthly, human society<sup>51</sup> by fashioning those emanations into statutes (*awḍā'*) that belong to a physical world, keyed to circumstances that alter over time.<sup>52</sup>

Thus speaker-prophets actually make law; they legislate. Al-Sijistānī explicitly credits *nubūwa* in one section of his *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* with the power and capacity "to make (*yaṣna'u*) the *sharī'a*."<sup>53</sup> The agent (*fā'il*) of each religion (*millā*) is its speaker-prophet. Because Islam is better than all other religions, we know therefore that its "agent," its fashioner, is himself better than the other prophets.<sup>54</sup>

One reason why individual prophets have this agency is a response to the diverse circumstances in which they operate. The intelligible model from which they derive their laws is eternal but not so the temporal world and the various human societies in which they live. The outcome of prophetic activity is different in each case; each religion will necessarily differ from the others. Al-Sijistānī admits this difference and notes that literal religion tends to promote conflict because of this. Discord and disagreement are an unfortunate repercussion of prophetic history.<sup>55</sup> The Ismaili response to this dilemma, as given by al-Sijistānī, is that it is precisely for the same reason that none should rely on the open form of the religion; rather these differences serve to draw the serious person to the hidden truth that is the true intelligible reality behind them all.<sup>56</sup>

Why then do prophets perform this peculiar function of translating intellect into physical representation and how do they do it? Why is the mission of prophets not only to receive inspiration but contains also an obligation to make it accessible to ordinary men? To be sure in ordinary prophetic tradition where there is a heavy emphasis on the historical circumstances of God's intervention in human affairs, anecdotal answers to such questions abound, often arising from particular conditions and events. But given the philosophical assumptions al-Sijistānī has superimposed on that tradition, such solutions are no longer tenable. In the philosophy of Plotinus, the attainment of intellectual life is a solitary achievement and may or may not result in a commitment to teach others. No logical



concomitance connects having a vision of the One and undertaking to explain the One to others. The end of philosophy is contemplation which has little or nothing to do with mundane existence at all. For al-Sijistānī, in contrast, the two activities are part and parcel of the same office. The dual nature of prophecy is vital. The knowledge possessed by a prophet is twofold: knowledge of the heavens and knowledge of explanation.<sup>57</sup> A prophet not only obtains perfect intellection but equally the means to turn that vision into the material of a physical law and social code that is purposefully designed to teach and to bring mankind into conformity with the reality of the eternal, spiritual realm.

Perhaps the philosophical explanation of this second function, although only hinted at rather than directly expressed by al-Sijistānī, lies in the concept of perfection. God, in Neoplatonic thinking, creates simply because He is perfect. Whatever is perfect overflows and radiates. It gives, not by necessity, but by essence. Thus, possibly, the prophet, in reaching perfection through the acquisition of total intellection, likewise radiates and thereby illuminates the lives of those fortunate enough to find themselves within the range of his radiant glow. His adherents thus conceive an attraction to him, something in the manner by which a light appearing in the darkness draws the attention of all who witness it. He commands the deference of those who follow him by his mere presence as the lighthouse of truth in an ocean of ignorance. They, in turn, warm themselves in his fire. These images all occur frequently in al-Sijistānī's writings about prophecy.<sup>58</sup>

The question as to how the prophet actually incorporates what he knows of eternal, timeless intellect into a set of religious prescriptions is more conspicuous in al-Sijistānī works. *Tanzīl*, a common Arabic term for revelation, denotes the "coming down" or "descent" of the message upon the prophet and through him mankind. Another more particular term is *ta'līf*, which means in this context to codify or make into scripture.<sup>59</sup> Ordinarily the process of speaking involves converting meanings (*ma'ānī*) into expressions (*'ibārāt*). In prophecy the message (*risāla*) arrives in the heart of the prophet. It is thus equivalent to the meanings. Subsequently the prophet composes (*'allafa*) scripture based on the message.<sup>60</sup> The tools that make possible the manifestation of prophecy are legal deeds (*al-a'māl al-sharī'iya*) and articulated scriptural declarations (*al-aqāwīl al-mu'allafa al-mantiqiya*).<sup>61</sup> The prophet adjusts them, changing, adding, or subtracting, until satisfied that they are perfect.<sup>62</sup>

Al-Sijistānī comments, in this context, on the Quranic description of revelation which suggests three different avenues for its transmission (*Qur'ān* 42: 51): (a) by revelation (*wahy*), (b) from behind a veil (*min warā' al-ḥijāb*), or (c) by sending a messenger. In the first method the intellect inspires (*'ayyada*) the prophet directly. The second also comes from the intellect but in this case through (from behind) the soul.<sup>63</sup> For al-Sijistānī the *Qur'ān* is, in fact, intellect incarnate (*'aql mujassam*).<sup>64</sup> The function of a legislating prophet, a *nāṭiq*, therefore, is to transform intellect into something having body or corporeal existence because prophecy's field of application is the mundane world, despite its references to the sublime. Just as nature incorporates intellect, sacred law embodies intellect as

well. The prophet is the deputy of intellect and his product is a physical approximation of that intellect.

To give concrete meaning to his description of how the speaker-prophet functions in his social role, al-Sijistānī often resorts to the image of the physician.<sup>65</sup> Just as a doctor treats bodily ills by a curative regimen, so too does the prophet apply his prescriptions to the sickness of the soul as it flounders through its attachment with corporeal being. For al-Sijistānī the soul in a body cannot be treated separately from that body but rather together with it. Thus while the prophet's regimen<sup>66</sup> seeks to discipline what is potentially spiritual, namely the soul, it proceeds by the application of rules that ostensibly govern physical conduct. Worship (*'ibāda*) of God, for example, is a spiritual act and might, accordingly therefore, contain only intellectual content which requires cognizance, not physical deeds. That does not suffice. Most of the mainstream Ismaili authors, including al-Sijistānī, deny that intellection and mental awareness are enough in this case because, according to them, mankind is a terrestrial animal with a soul *and* a body, and as such must observe the rule of works alongside faith. The religion of the lawgiver, therefore, prescribes for physical, as well as spiritual, life.

On the other hand, the law that the prophet composes, his *sharī'a*, must not be taken solely as a matter of the physical world in which its incarnation first occurs. Rather, to use an organic image often employed by al-Sijistānī, it is a seed. The *sharī'a* is the seed of the sciences and truths.<sup>67</sup> As a summons, a *da'wa*, it beckons toward a deeper reality; within, the seed kernel grows and, if properly nourished, bears fruit. The prophet's physical expressions and symbolic language engender an emerging and blossoming of the sublime, timeless form which lies within, and that of the truths behind and beyond. And so there is no salvation in bodily perfection; the body is like the casing or shell around the inner kernel. As if they are shells, there is no access to truth or to salvation for those creatures who exist as bodies alone without the sprouting and growth of the inner plant. The *sharī'a* must, therefore, regulate the whole of its environment and the special task of prophecy is to achieve this dual purpose.

Moreover the message of the prophet must reach all persons, both those who comprehend intellectually and those who merely follow a received tradition. A messenger is especially necessary for the latter who do not have much capacity for purely rational life. They are unstable, with varying amounts of imperfection caused by an inharmony and dissonance of temperament. Nevertheless, the pure of soul, the *nafs zakīya*, is sent to communicate with them. He shares their physical form and can reach them through auditory means in a common language.<sup>68</sup>

But the mundane world is also a temporal one; its subservience to the motion of the celestial bodies is axiomatic, and thus it endures constant change. No matter how exact and precise the intention of its architect, a law once formulated immediately loses the certainty on which it was originally based. In the absence of the lawgiver, difference (*ikhṭilāf*) rears its ugly head and confusion follows.

Dissension and conflict are its result even within a single religious community.<sup>69</sup> Thus the attempt to impose timeless prescriptions upon a temporal realm, to make an eternal law cover the flow of history, and to ordain a spiritual order within a cycle of generation and corruption is doomed to failure. A lawgiving prophet cannot bring perfection to a world that is fundamentally imperfect. That, of course, is not even his ultimate purpose, which is rather to direct mankind to the path out of that imperfect state to one that promises permanence and perpetual stability, an abode of rest, tranquillity, and beauty.

Why attempt the governing of the ungovernable? Why fashion a law at all? Because within that imperfect, physical world there are parts or portions of soul. These participate in one degree or another in rationality due to soul's proximity on its higher side to intellect. As history unfolds the prophets achieve a progressive improvement of the human lot. Each one of them adds to what the previous one decreed; each confirms his predecessor and then abrogates his law by improving upon it. Inexorably, cycle by cycle, the prophets raise mankind out of the darkness toward a future time when the distinction between physical and spiritual existence will disappear. At that time the difference inherent in the circumstances of temporally adduced laws will yield a single, coherent truth. And soul in all of its particulars – each individual portion of it – will finally move together from what it is potentially to what it might be actually.

Al-Sijistānī sees his own time as that of the sixth lawgiving prophet who is Muḥammad, founder of Islam. This is the best and most complete of all the legal or religious regimes. Islam is, in fact, the crown and seal for this whole series of attempts to formulate a rule bridging both mundane and sublime worlds together. In terms of its ability to deal with both, nothing will or can surpass it. Islam is the perfection, in so far as it can be called perfect, of intellectual representation in the physical realm. The *Qur'ān* is the most perfect form of scripture – the most complete incarnation of intellect. But Islamic scripture and its law, or any other for that matter, has not escaped the handicap of having to employ the language and symbols of physical man – and one particular tribe of men at that. Prophecy achieves its ultimate success when it abrogates even itself.

## Interpretation and its institution

From an earlier discussion the importance of the normative world (*'ālam al-waḍ'*) should be obvious. This is the critical third realm in which the moral imperative comes to define man's place in the cosmos. Significantly, al-Sijistānī does not tie it to what he himself sees as the sphere of philosophy. Rather it is an addition imposed on human society by virtue of the special relationship between God and mankind in view of man's participation in rationality not essentially but voluntarily. Because man can choose between right and wrong, good and bad, there must be a governing body that guides that choice. Such a policy exists, not as a form of natural law, but as a kind of sacramental grace. True, God imposes His will by fiat. But while God's will is reason itself, it must be conveyed to individual human beings personally. In matters related to human affairs, God elects to retain a divinely designated agency and thus preserves His moral command through a living, ever present understanding of it that emanates from an institution specifically created to dispense and sanctify it. This doctrine forms the crux of Shiism; for the Shiites both reason and the will of God reside for mankind in an ecclesiastical hierarchy of which the imam is most often the highest living embodiment.

At another and much simpler level, a standard of moral action might be determined simply by reference to its representation in the plain form of the law. This would be the revealed scripture, the *tanzīl* – a literal, unexplained, lifeless exemplar of the prophet's divine message. All men may read the text of the law and learn something from it. Basically its existence is clear to all; its literal content readily apparent, Islam and its *sharī'a* are widely spread, widely accepted, and widely applied. But is this enough to insure the complete fulfillment of God's purpose?

Al-Sijistānī's vision of the cosmos, to this point, and of the prophet's role in it, are not radically threatening to established authority within Islam. On the contrary his ideas about prophecy are not necessarily out of place in either the general Islamic context or in that of other prophetic religions. Where a distinguishing feature in his position starts is a doctrine concerning religious knowledge that has not yet been discussed in detail, although it is already implicit in the process

whereby the lawgiver translates intellectual reality into physical symbol. If the symbol does not actually convey in precise, unambiguous terms what it was meant to indicate, it will always be subject, or possibly subject, to erroneous interpretation. A similitude no matter how finely crafted is never the real thing that it simulates. The physical form of a symbolic representation, moreover, which must stand for something sublime and spiritual, precludes automatically that what is apparent be what it symbolizes. The words man uses to describe timeless, intelligible reality only hint at it, even when those words belong to the masterful discourse of sacred, prophetic scripture. But then who possesses knowledge of the real truths? How does a believer determine what constitutes the authentic meaning of the prophet's message?

The Ismailis were famous for recognizing this important distinction. For them what is apparent, the *ẓāhir*, cannot reliably indicate its original spiritual meaning, the *bāṭin*, without additional, explanatory factors. Because they held, moreover, that there is necessarily a *bāṭin* or inner meaning for all *ẓāhir*, they were called *al-Bāṭiniya* (the "Esotericists"), an appellation that is not incorrect, for they certainly subscribed to a doctrine which readily admitted that for every *ẓāhir* there is a *bāṭin*. But this is, in one sense, little more than confessing that words have meanings and that the relationship between one and the other involves knowing, not merely the physical composition of the letters, but of the meanings of which they are referents. The real question concerns the logic of the connection between symbol and its interpretation. Or to put the central question succinctly: can the meaning be adduced from the symbol through ordinary investigation or is there no apparent logical method by which a person can proceed from symbol to meaning?

The problem then might be one of rules and conventions. All languages have their grammars and each word denotes a meaning or meanings by conventions within that given linguistic set. But what happens when statements stray from the simple, straightforward functions of speech into metaphor and intentional ambiguity? Scripture and religious injunctions abound with situations of ambiguity and uncertainty. In attempting to understand them, how does either the ordinary reader or the learned authority move from metaphoric expression (*majāz*) to the real (*ḥaqīqa*) or vice versa? This issue was itself foreseen, at least for Muslims, by an explicit statement in the Holy Book about ambiguous (*mutashābiḥa*) and unambiguous (*muḥkama*) verses (*Qur'ān* 3: 7).<sup>1</sup>

One standard answer recognizes that language, as a human convention, allows ordinary, rational mortals access to its linguistic rules because these rules are a result of a social process in which all speakers of a given tongue participate. Meaning and symbol, language and its referents, are related by a logic common to human discourse, even though that logic is less well understood by some than others. The Philosopher, Ibn Rushd, in his treatise on the connection between religion and the study of philosophy, explained scriptural interpretation in exactly this way.

The meaning of interpretation (*ta'wīl*) is extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such as calling a thing by name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in the accounts of kinds of metaphorical speech.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, although Ibn Rushd himself thought that the act of interpretation should not be undertaken by any but those skilled in demonstrative reasoning – i.e. Philosophers – the concept expressed by him involves an orderly, rational procedure, available to anyone possessing adequate scholarly knowledge and credentials.<sup>3</sup>

This issue was never quite so simple for the Ismailis. Nor is their attitude uniform for all groups within their movement or always readily apparent and easily understood. Nevertheless, certain points are common enough in Ismaili pronouncements. In the first place, for them, the very imposition of scriptural law was understood to carry with it a definitive and authoritative interpretation, a *ta'wīl*, or at the very least, an institution able to provide that interpretation at any given moment. The physical words and symbols of a properly constituted religion always refer to a spiritual reality. The connection between the real and its linguistic or symbolic expression, moreover, was known above all to the law-giving prophet who created those symbols in the first place. The aggregate of those symbols constitutes the scripture or *tanzīl*. In addition to this, each prophet was succeeded by someone charged with the execution of the legacy left when that lawgiver died. Such a person is the *waṣī*, a term indicating executorship. He is, moreover, an *asās* or Founder. This latter term names the *waṣī* as the founder of a systematic, inner interpretation of the outwardly manifest scripture and its law. In other words the *waṣī* established the correct “interpretation” for the literal form of the scripture.<sup>4</sup>

This doctrine tends to make of the “Founder” something almost superior to the primary instigator of the religion in question, since it admits that the letter is dead without its meaning and it is the latter which the Founder provides. Indeed this point of view often gave rise to heresies. The matter, however, does not go to this extreme for al-Sijistānī. In his writings, instead of this, it is always amply clear that the lawgiving prophet (the *nāṭiq*) is also a Founder. It is common for him to speak of the two Founders (*asāsān*): the *nāṭiq* and the *waṣī*. The function of “founding” and interpreting belong to the lawgiver as well as to the *waṣī*.<sup>5</sup> A precise delineation of the relationship between the two, not surprisingly, was of major concern to al-Sijistānī.

For Shiism in general the position of 'Alī relative to that of Muḥammad is a delicate issue. Shiism is primarily an attachment to 'Alī and to his family. In the concept of interpretation, as introduced above, 'Alī becomes eventually the sole determiner of the true meaning of Quranic scripture and thus of the law based on it. To refer to him as the “Founder” of interpretation and the institutions formed to preserve and propagate it, threatens to diminish the role of Muḥammad. Since the imamate of 'Alī's ordained successors serves as the exclusive institution which

maintains, spreads and enforces precisely that interpretation and hence the law, only the imam possesses knowledge of the interpretation as founded by 'Alī and then passed from one imam to the next. For the Shiah no one truly comprehends the sacred word without direct access to the imam. And since this is an oral tradition, the referential authority must be a living, ever present source of it. Thus it is easy to exalt the bearer of the "meaning" above the messenger who brought only the "word".

That danger, however, which is common enough in some sectors of the Ismaili movement, does not play a part in al-Sijistānī's thinking, certainly not in those works of his under consideration here. He offers instead a carefully constructed answer to this problem which in part reflects his cosmic vision. Just as the higher sublime world has two Roots (*aṣḡlān*) which are intellect and soul, so too does the mundane, lower world require two Founders (*asāsān*). One is the lawgiving prophet and the other is his *waṣī*. Both are *asās*, though the ability of the lesser – that is, the *waṣī* – is only a portion of that of the greater – the *nāṭiq*.<sup>6</sup> A lawgiving prophet provides both the *tanzīl* – revelation in its scriptural form – and the *ta'wīl*, its interpretation. All *nāṭiqs* are *asās* but not all *asās* are *nāṭiqs*.<sup>7</sup>

Although each of them has a degree of access to the world of intellect – both are *mu'ayyad* and the *ta'yīd* gives them each sacred powers – the *waṣī* interprets only and cannot therefore formulate scripture.<sup>8</sup> This is why the interpretation cannot be written down. If it were, as was done by some Shiah when they sought to create a corpus of *ḥadīth* based on the words of various imams, such a secondary scripture also requires interpretation. Ideally an imam must explain and interpret all utterances of previous imams, just as a living imam must exist to explain the original scripture of a lawgiving revelator. Only in the absence of such an imam is it possible to rely on *ḥadīth* or *akhbār*. Significantly, al-Sijistānī displays a vague attitude concerning the actual authority of a present imam and also fails to cite, except in extremely rare moments, any of the past imams. This suggests that his teachings are based on intellectual rather than textual principles. The function of interpretation cannot and should not be anchored in written texts.<sup>9</sup>

The difference between revelation, *tanzīl*, and interpretation, *ta'wīl*, was the subject of a chapter of al-Sijistānī's *al-Maqālīd*.<sup>10</sup> There he offers a helpful analogy in order to explain both what *ta'wīl* is and how it should function. The *tanzīl*, he says, resembles something having an undeveloped, organic form, whereas the *ta'wīl* is like a product of the craftsman who works with the organic material in order to make it into something of great benefit. One of his examples is wood, which in a natural state is good only as fuel for a fire but when crafted becomes a beneficial object such as a door, a box, arrows, spears, a pulpit, or a chair. *Tanzīl* is a set of,

subjective items and restricted phrases beneath which there are hidden meanings. *Ta'wīl* on the part of its master puts all of these into a proper context and extracts from each phrase what was intended.<sup>11</sup>

*Tanzīl* is the expression (*lafẓ*); *ta'wīl* is the meaning (*ma'nā*) contained in the

expression. The master of *ta'wīl* approaches each word or phrase in order to adduce the original meanings intended by them.<sup>12</sup> The idea of exploiting or nurturing what was “seeded” in the scripture is another important way of seeing the process.

The power of the one who performs the action of *ta'wīl* is the reverse of *tanzīl*.<sup>13</sup> A lawgiver sees the content of intellectual and spiritual reality and then embodies it in symbol and word. The *mu'awwil* – the person who performs the *ta'wīl* – starts with the literal form and traces it back to its root in the intelligible realm.<sup>14</sup> The result of this act<sup>15</sup> yields something that truly is, the *ḥaqā'iq*, the true realities, of which the physical manifestation is merely a similitude. Unquestionably, the *ḥaqā'iq* are always superior to its physical representation.<sup>16</sup>

And these “truths” represent something more complex than that given commonly by metaphorical extension of meaning. Two examples among the many provided by al-Sijistānī may suffice as illustrations. In one he interprets the ritual slaughter of an animal for the *'aqīqa* ceremony as actually symbolizing spiritual birth.<sup>17</sup> In the other he offers his own *ta'wīl* of the famous light verse of the *Qur'ān* [24: 35]:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree.<sup>18</sup>

As an example that al-Sijistānī offers himself in this context to demonstrate the difference between *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl*, his “interpretation” assumes special importance in the way it indicates what sorts of knowledge may be perceived in the scripture.

According to al-Sijistānī the “light” (*nūr*) mentioned in this verse is not natural light, as from the sun, but reason (*nūr 'aqlī*) from the Word, the Preceder (*sābiq*, intellect) and the Follower (*tālī*, soul). Of the “lamp” he says continuing,

The lamp is the lamp of knowledge standing in his [the *nāṭiq*, Muḥammad's] place after him to spread knowledge amongst his community in order that it be guided by the light of his knowledge to the way of God and be freed from the darkness of doubt and dissension.<sup>19</sup>

But he moves on from this relatively uncontroversial level of analysis to conclude that the “glass” (*zuḡaja*) refers to the first imam Ḥasan, son of 'Alī, whose hold on the imamate was weak and extremely fragile (like glass), and that the “star” (*kawkab*) is Ḥusayn, the second imam, whose knowledge and prominence resembles a star. Al-Sijistānī's *ta'wīl*, therefore, precedes by reasoning but not by reasoning without prejudice. His Shiism determines how he sees the meanings of scriptural references rather than abstract reason. He does not directly confess, in this instance, to what authority his understanding of the text is linked.

If the Holy Scripture itself admits to having ambiguous (*mutashābiḥa*) verses, certitude in regard to them must come from proper authority. Elsewhere al-Sijistānī sees that as flowing from the “progeny of the prophet and the *waṣī*.”<sup>20</sup> Ambiguous verses, which he says are known to be so when upon hearing they



contradict custom and habit, are self-evident often enough. An example he cites is the speech of the ant in the account of Sulaymān and the queen of Sheba.<sup>21</sup> Such verses quite obviously require, as the *Qur'ān* itself admits, the interpretations of "those firmly grounded in knowledge," which persons are, in Shiite thought, the imams. But do the other verses that are not quite so obviously metaphorical also require such treatment?

But why does the *Qur'ān* even contain these ambiguous portions? Why does it have a double nature at all? Al-Sijistānī's response suggests that the evidence of ambiguity is not the sole factor in the application of *ta'wīl*. Since, he says, the cause of natural compositions and of the *Qur'ān* derive from a single source and since natural compositions come in a form whose utility is both readily apparent and concealed, the Scripture will be likewise. Just as knowing the usefulness of natural objects often requires the expertise of scientists (e.g. mathematicians, engineers, astronomers), so too the *Qur'ān*. Even the unambiguous (*muḥkama*) verses contain concealed knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-khafiya*).<sup>22</sup>

An opponent might ask why did the lawgiver neglect to provide the *ta'wīl* himself, thereby forcing his *waṣī* (here 'Alī) to undertake this role. Al-Sijistānī's answer reconfirms the importance of looking for the proper interpretation. If the apostle had openly proclaimed the *ta'wīl*, his followers would have abandoned the *tanzīl*. Al-Sijistānī's example in this case is the meaning of ritually purifying through ablution with water, which actually represents the believer purifying his heart with knowledge against doubt and misgiving. The lawgiver was deliberately silent about this *ta'wīl* as a way of insuring that his people would truly and fully implement his law. In creating ambiguity he made the search for knowledge and truth necessary; that search is a part of the law.<sup>23</sup>

Thus only by fully appreciating the concept of *ta'wīl* can one understand al-Sijistānī's teachings about prophecy in its most complete form. For him *nubūwa* encompasses not just the lawgiver and his *waṣī*, but the imams and their associates as well. Though of a distinctly lesser rank in the hierarchy, the *lawāḥiq* and perhaps other officials of the *da'wa* share some small portion of *nubūwa* and therefore in principle some knowledge of *ta'wīl*. As an ecclesiastical function the role of *ta'wīl* is to convince and to compel correct belief by constantly verifying the truth. Ordinary Muslims follow the method of *taqlīd*, which is unthinking acceptance of a tradition. The *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq* proceed by *taḥqīq*, which means to attain certainty, not blindly, but rationally.<sup>24</sup> The ambiguity of scripture in and of itself leads them to the search for its truths, for *taḥqīq*. The literalists remain confined to a superficial knowledge of the word, while the latter move beyond that and penetrate to the eternal verities of which it is merely a reflection.

While only the lawgiver, the *wāḍi'*, knows all of the *ḥaqā'iq*, others, including the lesser ranks of the *da'wa*, obtain some of the truths.<sup>25</sup> Yet they remain aware that behind these truths there are other truths. In this way the *sharī'a* always has validity; it continues to lead in the direction of further *ḥaqā'iq*.<sup>26</sup> The *sharī'a* is the "seed" (*badhr*) of science and truth.<sup>27</sup> Another of al-Sijistānī's analogies for this constant pursuit of knowledge is also interesting. The diet of the literalists, he

says, restricts them to only one type of food, but the People of Truth relish a variety of foodstuffs representing different kinds of nutriment.<sup>28</sup>

Two concepts have merged here in the thought of al-Sijistānī: *ta'wīl* and *da'wa*. The latter, implying more than an appeal for a purely political cause, is, in fact, an institution that sustains the *ta'wīl*. As a consequence, another problem in trying to explain his notion of *ta'wīl* is whether or not to equate *ta'wīl* with *ta'līm* – the latter being the technical term for teaching in the sense of exclusive religious dogma. Does the *da'wa* sustain a deepening process of inquiry or does it merely propagate a definitive set of answers? *Ta'wīl* is interpretation but is it *an* interpretation or *the* Interpretation? If *ta'wīl* is not an activity but rather a definitive Teaching about the meaning of the scripture, then it also becomes a dogma – a *ta'līm*. In later, Alamut Ismailism, as described by Shahrastānī and attacked by al-Ghazzālī, a stress on authority emphasizes the concept of Teaching, and thus *ta'wīl* equals *ta'līm*. In the writings of al-Sijistānī, on the other hand, a good deal of evidence suggests that he and the other high ranking members of the *da'wa* practice the science of *ta'wīl*, and in fact interpret scripture and *sharī'a* on their own without explicitly recognizing a set dogma.<sup>29</sup> Interpretation thus was, for these early writers, more of a living sacrament the dispensation of which was the main function of the *da'wa*.

From this it is clear that the ecclesiastical function of the *da'wa* has great importance at the time of al-Sijistānī. The imam was not the sole fountainhead of truth, or rather if he was, the exercise of relating the *zāhir* to a *bāṭin* is a duty of subordinate functionaries as well. In this view the imam is a source of inspiration but not necessarily of an exact, specific teaching. The senior *dā'īs* – at least those who are the *lawāḥiq* – also are *mu'awwilūn*. The hierarchy of temporal authorities, moreover, includes more than the speaker–prophets, the *waṣīs*, and the imams. In addition there are in descending order the Adjuncts (*lawāḥiq*), the Wings (*ajniha*), the Ordained (*ma'dhūnūn*) and believers (*mu'minūn*).<sup>30</sup> *Ta'yīd*, the divine inspiration which makes the prophet a prophet, furnishes each member of this hierarchy some portion of access to religious knowledge. How and in what degree is uncertain since there are statements in early Ismaili literature indicating various answers. But for al-Sijistānī without doubt those who are *mu'ayyad* include the imams and also the Adjuncts.<sup>31</sup>

Another serious issue for these early Ismaili authorities is the extent to which all scripture requires interpretation or is necessary only in those cases where the verses are distinctly ambiguous (*mutashābihā*).<sup>32</sup> Al-Sijistānī seems to claim both. In discussing the famous reference of *Qur'ān* 3: 7 about the *mutashābihāt* verses and their *ta'wīl*,<sup>33</sup> he states forthrightly that the *rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm* (those firmly ground in knowledge) are the imams and other members of the hierarchy.<sup>34</sup> When, however, he also offers his own examples of a *ta'wīl* in his *Maqālīd*, his purpose is to illustrate how one might extract from the *tanzīl* its hidden meanings.<sup>35</sup> In these latter cases his basic premise is the following: just as natural things exist in two ways such that their use and benefits are in one part obvious to all and in another known only to authorities thoroughly versed in scientific investigations,

so too the words of the *Qur'ān*. Thus by implication *ta'wīl* is first of all an activity of the *da'wa*, confirming its sacramental function. But he also extends this activity to all features of scripture and religious law. What he has said is that every aspect of physical reality mirrors an intelligible existence and thus *ta'wīl* is a science with universal application.<sup>36</sup> In scripture, nevertheless, some verses are of such ambiguity that they cannot be taken in their literal sense no matter what. Thus ultimately, on the problem of whether all outward expressions necessarily mirror a concealed, esoteric truth, al-Sijistānī holds that this is the case. Even the *muḥkamāt* verses of the *Qur'ān* yield hidden knowledge (*'ulūm khafīya*).<sup>37</sup> But this need not be an absolute judgment because some of the fixed (*muḥkama*) injunctions in the law are already universal; an identical rule exists in every set of laws – such as the prohibition against suicide (his example). No *ta'wīl* is required therefore to bring this plain principle into conformity with universal reason.<sup>38</sup>

Arguably, the most frequent and most perplexing charge against the Ismailis in the medieval period is a claim that in subscribing to a belief in these *ḥaqā'iq*, they denied the validity of the *sharī'a* itself. Certainly it might be assumed that if one comes to know the true meaning that constitutes the intelligible reality behind the outward form of the scripture, it ought to be possible to dispense with the latter. That such a possibility is implicit in this doctrine cannot be rejected. After all the goal of mankind's efforts is the attainment of spiritual life and eternity. Body and all that is corporeal is without doubt temporal. Whereas salvation lies solely in what is purely intelligible, the physical forms of laws, statutes and other injunctions are thus temporal like the body that applies them. Laws and the acts they command are physical and pertain to a temporal world; a literalist religion is itself transitory.

But does knowledge of the eternal *bāṭin* release a believer from the obligation of the temporal *ẓāhir*? No question caused such distress amongst the various Ismaili groups as did this one. For them one form of this problem was connected to the messiahship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. If he had already appeared as the Messiah, then, some argued, the outward law of Islam was no longer valid. Another doctrine, however, simply recognized the superiority of *bāṭin* over *ẓāhir* and accordingly allowed the neglecting of the latter. Many of the so-called *bāṭinī* groups were accused of this. It was a common charge against either the Sufis or the Philosophers. That it was a serious issue for the early Ismailis is clear from the countless times important writers, such as both al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī, deny it, as well as from the ample evidence which exists showing that many factions of the movement ceased to observe Islamic laws and rituals.

When al-Sijistānī refers to his own people as *Ahl al-Ta'wīl* or *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq*,<sup>39</sup> the impression is heightened that ultimately only the *bāṭin* counts, even if he avoids the concomitant problem of what this means for the position of 'Alī vis à vis Muḥammad. On the latter issue he states consistently and unambiguously that only the lawgiver (the *wāḍi'*) fully comprehends the entirety of the *ḥaqā'iq*.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the superiority of Muḥammad over 'Alī was, for al-Sijistānī, a settled fact. Likewise the position of 'Alī, as Founder, placed him above the imams who

followed him. But he also holds that the key to paradise is knowledge (*'ilm*), pure and simple, because paradise lies in the realm of intellect. What then is the value of works or deeds?

In al-Sijistānī's usage, works (*a'māl*) include all those observances and obligations created by the imposition of Islam that regulate physical activity and earthly life. The *sharī'a* equals works; it precedes by action and movement (*ḥaraka*). All motion is finite and temporary.<sup>41</sup> Thus prayer and fasting are acts and are a part of corporeal existence; they are *zāhir*, even though they also signify a spiritual *bāṭin* which must be taken as their true meaning. In contrast to some of his contemporaries, al-Sijistānī argued, however, that the *ḥaqā'iq* must remain the intellectual ideals of the individual, physical particulars until such time as soul separates from body. To dispense with the law because it governs only the mundane world is unthinkable as long as one lives in that world. Physical existence requires physical religion.

There is abundant evidence of this attitude in his writings. One chapter of *al-Maqālīd*, for example, bears the title, "That Obtaining Knowledge of the Truths Within the Laws Does not Rescind [the requirement of] Works."<sup>42</sup> He notes that 'Alī and the imams not only continued to implement the law but added for themselves supererogatory duties.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Sijistānī's greatest fear – one he expresses far more often – is not that the Islamic *sharī'a* will be abandoned but that the majority of Muslims, whose understanding of scripture is exclusively traditional (*taqlīdī*), will never comprehend even a portion of its spiritual and hence intellectual reality.<sup>44</sup> As the messenger–prophet summons believers to scripture (*tanzīl*), his *waṣī* calls them to its *ta'wīl*. The *da'wa*, therefore, is double. Those not lost to blindness will respond, not only by adhering to the *sharī'a*, but by seeking the living guidance of the authorities who understand and provide its *ta'wīl*.<sup>45</sup> If he had ever flirted with the *bāṭinī* heresy or counseled a repudiation of Islamic law, such a position is definitely no longer evident in his surviving works which systematically deny and reject it.

Returning then in sum to the central issue of the relationship between *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl* (*zāhir* and *bāṭin*), al-Sijistānī advances no ready solution that explains a methodical technique of moving from one to the other. Nor is it clear that he confines the practice of *ta'wīl* solely in the hands of the imam, which might be one way of avoiding the issue, since this claim would repudiate its use by anyone else. Rather al-Sijistānī's view combines these two options. In origin the science of *ta'wīl* belongs to legislating prophets and was obviously so fundamental a part of the work of making law that it was not necessarily understood by them as a separate practice. A lawgiver after all proceeds from *ḥaqā'iq* to *'ibāra* (expression)<sup>46</sup> and thus the reverse is normally unnecessary for him, although it is naturally implicit in the process of converting the intelligible facts into symbol and scripture. The explicit activity of *ta'wīl* begins with each lawgiver's successor, the *waṣī*. Here commences the analysis of the word which seeks to understand what it means by tracing it to its origin in the divine world. In the case

of the *waṣī*, knowledge of this procedure is nearly as accurate as that of the lawgiver himself, although only the lawgiver knows all of the *ḥaqā'iq*. In subsequent generations, however, the secret of *ta'wīl* – its limitations and opportunities – resides in the ecclesiastical hierarchy created by the *waṣī-asās*. The supreme authority in that hierarchy is the imam (or to use al-Sijistānī's exact term the *mutimm* – someone who completes the mission of the Founders). In matters that involve the comprehension of physical sciences, learned authorities are those well versed in astronomy, physics, biology, mathematics and the like. For the realm of law and religion (the '*ālam al-waḍ'*'), there are also authorities and primary among them are the chosen descendants of the *waṣī* who inherit a portion of his authority. In the era of Islam these are the Aliid, Fatimid caliphs and the *da'wa* that supports them. Thus the science of *ta'wīl* belongs to a small group of properly ordained specialists and the knowledge of eternal truth, which is the prerequisite for salvation and ultimate happiness, must be gleaned from them because it exists nowhere else.

## Salvation and the womb of history

Moving finally to the all important question of man's ultimate purpose, al-Sijistānī again confronts the two trends in his thought that persist in conflict: history and philosophy. The issues in this case revolve around the meaning of the Arabic terms *ba'th* and *qiyāma*. Both mean resurrection and might be used interchangeably in most Islamic accounts. However, al-Sijistānī employs each in an apparently different sense, leading to a complicated doctrine concerning the salvation and resurrection of the soul not easily recognized or understood, perhaps by intention.<sup>1</sup> He almost certainly hints at a distinction in his polemical *al-Ifrikhār*, where he has written two separate chapters, one for each of these terms.<sup>2</sup> There is also much additional material in his *al-Maqālīd*.<sup>3</sup> Close examination of these chapters and other passages, however, does not readily admit to a firm statement in the matter.<sup>4</sup> What follows is therefore in part an interpretation of what evidence they contain and what problems remain.

To begin with for al-Sijistānī the concept of *ba'th* or *ba'th ba'd al-mawt* applies to the survival of the soul after it ceases its connection to a particular body. The natural, corporeal existence it once shared comes to an end; the body dies and dissolves into its constituent elements. He states forthrightly that there is no resurrection for the body, none at all. How then to translate *ba'th*?<sup>5</sup> The term "salvation," if it bears the sense of survival and eternal existence, is appropriate, although with reservations. *Qiyāma* more properly means "resurrection" in this context if it refers to an historical event wherein the Messiah returns, souls rise, and the day of judgment dawns. For al-Sijistānī the *qiyāma* concerns the advent of the *qā'im*, the Messiah, which signals the end of one era and the commencement of another, a time of reward and punishment, of paradise and hellfire.<sup>6</sup>

One problem is immediately obvious in this concept of salvation. It involves a continuing process whereby countless, individual partial souls escape bodily existence and achieve some form of permanence and eternity and it, therefore, carries no idea of temporal limitation. Salvation appears thus to indicate merely the reversion of individual souls in one degree or another to their source.<sup>7</sup> Yet in contrast resurrection, as used here, points to an historical event and one moment in time unlike all the rest.<sup>8</sup> Resurrection is by definition a messianic phenomenon involving the whole of mankind all at once.

The special position of mankind that makes of the human species a linchpin for the entire lower world leads naturally to this investigation of his ultimate purpose and final end. As in one way man is the reason for the existence of both himself within the physical world and all other corporeal beings as well, the terrestrial realm has no other purpose than to support and sustain man's sojourn in it until such time as he will emerge from the dual state implied in having both a body and a soul. At that moment his invisible form will be manifest: the inner man will be the only man.<sup>9</sup> But if there exists a dependent relationship between man and the physical world, does this moment when man ceases to be a part of it also invalidate the lower world, which previously existed solely for his sake? One concept of the resurrection requires the passage of mankind, as a whole, into some form of non-bodily existence. In al-Sijistānī's special understanding of this doctrine, all portions of soul – that is, every individual particular of soul, meaning here each person – would collectively move from a state of potentiality to one of actuality.<sup>10</sup> Time, which is the ceaseless movement of soul from condition to condition, would stop. The community of human soul will now enter eternal paradise or eternal hell.

How does this view relate to the notion of salvation? Al-Sijistānī's concept of *ba'th* envisions the salvation of mankind as an individual achievement. Specific persons one by one lose their attachments to body and continue as separate, spiritual beings. Rather than community salvation through an historical process culminating in a single apocalyptic denouement which fits outwardly the scriptural doctrine on this subject, al-Sijistānī knows that the philosophical scheme of his emanationist metaphysics will not permit the obliteration of material being in its entirety.<sup>11</sup> If intellect, let alone God, was once the source of natural creatures and the sublunar world, it must always be so. Otherwise the eternal will have changed and the whole structure of intelligible reality will prove false.

Although al-Sijistānī certainly hoped to plead for both of these solutions at the same time, again as with several earlier issues, the problem of salvation and resurrection seems to require that these two irreconcilable answers persist in al-Sijistānī's thought without resolution. On the one hand, he promises permanence, a residence in the Abode of the Everlasting, resurrection following death, and the advent of paradise and punishment. On the other, he must decide whether these are the achievements of individuals or of mankind as a whole and if it is to be the latter how this reconciles with his doctrine of emanation.

Learning individually to live the intellectual life, free of the defiling corruption of bodily desires, is what al-Sijistānī preaches as the main road to salvation. Physical appetites and lusts block the rational interests of the human soul and prevent it from rising out of its current predicament. If an individual cleaves to the knowledge imparted by the *da'wa*, which summons it to obedience and guidance, it commences a spiritual and hence intelligible life. As there is no reward in eternity that is connected in any way to physical existence, the pleasures of

paradise are not those of the body and hence this happiness is the only form of salvation possible.<sup>12</sup>

Within the Islamic context a straightforward denial of bodily resurrection occurs infrequently. Nevertheless, the doctrine of al-Sijistānī and other Ismailis of his time declares that there is no survival, no resurrection, nor any point in the revival of the body because the pleasures of paradise are not physical but rather mental. The mind or intellect receives the reward and the punishment as promised, not the body. The composite, synthetic body decays into its constituent elements, and once the soul departs from it, it ceases to exist. Rational soul participates alone in the resurrection and in the permanent existence of paradise.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Sijistānī even claims Quranic support for this doctrine, citing the opening of *Sūra* 50: 1–4 which reads in part “What! When we die and have become dust; that is a return (to life) far (from comprehension).” God answers this exclamation: “We already know how the earth departs from them.”<sup>14</sup> He claims, moreover, that the Quranic descriptions of bodily resurrection are intended only for those who believe nothing but what they see.<sup>15</sup> Verse 22: 7, for example, which says, “God will resurrect those who are in the graves,” actually means, “God will resurrect the souls of those whose bodies are in the graves.”<sup>16</sup> Needless to say this interpretation of these verses is not recognized by most Muslims.

Al-Sijistānī's doctrine at this point would support an argument that salvation and resurrection are exactly what the Philosophers had claimed. In fact al-Sijistānī's view of salvation closely resembles that of Plotinus and is also in accord with the teachings of his less Neoplatonic contemporaries, such as al-Fārābī. The soul leaves its former abode and travels to a spiritual realm on the measure of its acquisition of rational knowledge. Its reward is commensurate with its share of intelligibility. Alternately, failure to acquire knowledge of the truth brings punishment to the soul in the smallness of its position within the eternal world of intellect. Such souls remain far from God Who is the origin of all that is intelligible. Al-Sijistānī can add that the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq* with their intense devotion to the truths underlying scripture (and to its outward requirements as well) are consequently in the most enviable position. They are nearest to the reward and best prepared to receive it. Thus, although al-Sijistānī employs the common phrase *al-ba'th ba'd al-mawt*, he also maintains emphatically that there is no revivification for the body and therefore professes a doctrine that restricts salvation to a kind of individual attainment of mental happiness.

But if he is following the logic of Plato and the Neoplatonists in this, he must also be aware of their admission that particular souls leave one body only to become attached to another. If this were not so, where would the recently separated soul reside? Al-Sijistānī was himself accused of maintaining that the soul moves from body to body within its species. This is, in fact, a doctrine widely held by ancient Neoplatonists. On the other hand, al-Sijistānī denied the idea of metempsychosis in fairly explicit terms and ultimately it is hard to see how the writer of those texts which remain from his hand could have accepted any form of it.



What exactly is his position concerning disembodied soul? Quite obviously a few of his own followers as well as some of his critics believed that he had subscribed to a form of *tanāsukh* (metempsychosis). Both al-Bīrūnī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw testify to this.<sup>17</sup> Possibly, however, al-Kirmānī saw the problem in a way closer to the truth. In his *Riyāḍ* he notes what he himself considers unsavory implications in al-Sijistānī's doctrine of the soul "forgetting" its world when it descends into this one upon attachment to individual human beings. Al-Kirmānī knew that this was the doctrine of Plato and that it implied metempsychosis. But ultimately he admits,

What the author of the *Nuṣra* said in the forty-fourth chapter of his book entitled *al-Maqālīd* . . . indicates the contrary of what he said in his *Nuṣra*.<sup>18</sup>

That chapter of *al-Maqālīd* bears the title: "That Metempsychosis is False."<sup>19</sup> Evidently al-Kirmānī was satisfied that the doctrine in the later works of al-Sijistānī had corrected an earlier problem. Indeed elsewhere in *al-Maqālīd*, al-Sijistānī poses to a hypothetical opponent the following question: "When the souls separate from the bodies do they become attached to a world other than this or do they remain in this world?" He responds,

If he should reply that they remain in this world, request him to let us know how the soul could remain in the world of body after it separates from the body, and there is no way they are going to do that!<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, while this statement surely indicates that the souls do not transmigrate to another body in this world, it does not say how they survive or what salvation means. Al-Sijistānī's doctrine almost certainly recognizes that the soul, once away from the body, returns to a spiritual existence that is no longer particular in any significant way. It is not confined, for example, by place or time. Souls revert to their universal, undifferentiated self. Rejoining the all-soul like drops of waters reaching the sea, they do not remember nor cling to any aspect of bodily being. True, new humans come into existence, each with a portion of soul, but in no sense can the soul in the new person be said to be the one that was in the deceased. No one would ever think of claiming that the drop of water drunk on one day was the same one ingested a year ago. This analogy, however, is not complete because water belongs to nature and the reversion of one drop into the ocean carries no implication of a change in the quality or character of that water.<sup>21</sup> Soul, in contrast, somehow gains by its experience. Progressively, it moves toward its own potential fulfillment, whatever that may mean. Soul now qualitatively differs from soul in the past.

Still, it is unclear whether this is the only kind of existence the individual soul attains upon the death of the body. Does the soul whose intellectual achievement is substantial wait in limbo (or purgatory) without identity until the advent of the Messiah which is one possible interpretation?<sup>22</sup> If al-Sijistānī wishes to combine his philosophical sense of salvation with his historical concept of resurrection, he must solve the problem of where and what are the countless disembodied souls

from ages past. In a passage in his *Iftikhār*, he claims that "salvation is connected with the 'identity' of man which is itself an eternal substance."<sup>23</sup> What is this identity? And what about the issue of reward and punishment? How does his concept of salvation permit a differential degree of reward? Adamantly he insists that each soul receives recompense according to merit earned.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the similarity between al-Sijistānī's concept of intellectual salvation, with its mental pleasures and intelligible paradise, and its parallel occurrence in the doctrines of the Philosophers, what separates him from them is the further complications he adds by again imposing a dimension on their thought of sacred history. Philosophers, in his eyes, comprehend only the single dimension, which involves the vertical hierarchy. They know that intelligible life is the only eternal life and that the suppression of irascible passions and appetites, coupled with the practice of theoretical reasoning, will produce a kind of salvation, perhaps merely a certain degree of it. What is missing for them, according to al-Sijistānī, is access to the ultimate knowledge – knowledge of that which is truly spiritual or intellectual without any involvement of sensate physicality. To acquire such supreme knowledge an individual must appreciate history and come to recognize his own place in it. Only then will he realize that the knowledge he seeks can be provided solely by and through the *da'wa* which emanates from a living imam (or the speaking-prophet and his *waṣī*). Without understanding history fully, faith will be falsely directed; knowledge will be incomplete, if not simply erroneous.

Although the life of the next world is intellectual, al-Sijistānī nevertheless continues to advocate the law of Islam which he conceives to be a similitude of that true reality that exactly makes up the life he aims for. The physical world must have a law that regulates it and the best law for it, therefore, is the one which most appropriately commands those actions conducive to the attainment of ultimate happiness in the afterlife. In other words it requires a law that is based on the complete understanding, not only of the physical world, but of the spiritual as well. The message and its interpretation are, of necessity, united. Both are a part of the knowledge that leads to eternal life. One without the other is false and this is just as true of the *ta'wīl* as of the *tanzīl*. It is then vitally important to find and adhere to that source which provides both in exact and proper proportion. Also it is essential to seek the best and most perfect form of each and to do that it is necessary to join the followers of the truth, the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq*. The prophets have provided the required law and their *da'wa* is its interpretation. Being firmly grounded upon their unique access to the sum of intelligible reality, prophetic law is the ultimate source of both correct practical action and sound theoretical reasoning.

Some Islamic philosophers had accepted this claim concerning the lawgiving prophets but went on to argue that, once the prophet has left the scene, the philosophically astute must assume responsibility for the preservation of his message because only those with the gift of mental acumen retain access to it. If paradise is an intelligible existence, those with the greatest knowledge are also

those to receive the most handsome reward. The philosophers thus can anticipate an enviable recompense in the life to come. In al-Sijistānī's view the living authority is, instead, the *da'wa* and true knowledge emanates from it. Even though reward is based on the attainment of knowledge, the study of philosophy will not in and of itself lead to salvation. However, the Ismaili insistence on the existence of an esoteric truth, added to the philosophical inclination of their theologians, may have given the appearance that the instruction of the *da'wa* required an understanding of philosophy. Intellectualism appears to pervade their doctrines, suggesting that knowledge is a private reserve with limited access, making entry difficult for the less gifted. Despite this, although ultimate happiness is clearly to be intellectual, al-Sijistānī was not troubled by the eventual differential reward allotted in the afterlife for those persons having greater mental capacities. This result is obviously inherent in his concept of mental salvation. In his *al-Yanābī'* he takes pains to explain why this does not create a problem. One virtue of knowledge is that the less knowledgeable person cannot envy what he does not know. If the reward of paradise is knowledge and that simply, an ignorant soul will not understand what he or she does not have and therefore have no inclination or cause for envy and resentment.<sup>25</sup>

Still, all of this is a concept of salvation only and in general fails to consider also the idea of resurrection, although these terms were probably deliberately confounded by al-Sijistānī. He perceives this problem well enough and notes, in fact, that the doctrine of resurrection (*qiyāma*) was adamantly rejected by the Philosophers.<sup>26</sup> His own statements frequently override the simpler philosophical concept of salvation by adding to it an elaborate, messianic notion of resurrection and the end of time.

This second version returns to al-Sijistānī's (and the Ismailis') historical perspective. Crucial to it is a view of time that offers the following account. The current state of human affairs places man near the end of the six cycles of prophetic development. Adam began what man knows of history and with him there commenced a period of veiling wherein an outward physical reality hides and masks true existence. It becomes necessary during this time to understand all things by reference to their double state – that is, to their having both *ẓāhir* and a *bāḥin*. The role of Adam as the first speaker–prophet is important because it indicates the commencing of this condition, the *dawr al-satr*.<sup>27</sup> He thus closes the previous cycle, that is to say, the cycles that preceded Adam.<sup>28</sup> Adherence to outward appearances yields a false and misleading understanding of things, whether they be facets of the ordinary or of the sacred. Successively, lawgiving prophets have appeared as messengers from the divine world. Each in turn has constructed a scripture and a law to teach mankind and to draw him away from exclusive attachment to the falsity of the *ẓāhir*. Progressively each has added a further stage of perfection to this basic message. Mankind has now passed through the eras of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and entered the most complete and perfect of them, that of Muḥammad and Islam. As there are in the heavens seven divine letters which form the angelic root-words, *kūnī* and *qadar*, there are

to be in the terrestrial realm seven great speaking-prophets. Six have come; the seventh is awaited.

That this is an evolutionary process of development is shown by the various functions al-Sijistānī assigns to each speaker–prophet. For example, Adam began the *satr*, the veiling; Noah provided the first of the laws; Abraham initiated the institution of the imamate; Jesus is the harbinger of the Messiah.<sup>29</sup>

Each lawgiving prophet was succeeded by his *waṣī*, and the *waṣī* next by his appointed descendants as imams until reaching the seventh of them, who rises to become the speaking-prophet of the subsequent era. At present it is the era of Muḥammad, his *waṣī* 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the imams Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, 'Alī Zayn al-'ābidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Ja'far al-Šādiq, Ismā'īl, and finally Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.<sup>30</sup> The last of these seven is the speaker (*nāṭiq*) of the time to come, although for the duration of a special period, he remains in occultation. Because Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl is the seventh imam of the sixth cycle, he is also the initiator of the seventh cycle, an event during which the inner reality of spiritual things will no longer be hidden beneath the physical shells in which they are currently housed. The veil imposed at the advent of Adam will disappear when the Messiah, who is in fact Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, reappears. The *dawr al-satr* will give way to a *dawr al-kashf*. The resurrection (*qiyāma*) will be at hand.<sup>31</sup>

This is, of course, fairly standard Ismaili doctrine and in giving these historical concepts al-Sijistānī merely follows his own tradition as it must have been taught in the *da'wa* during his time or earlier. But the historical theme just outlined did not readily bend to accommodate the Neoplatonic vision of spiritual reality. This conflict is, it should be added, not a problem unique to the thought of al-Sijistānī but is a common dilemma in thinking about salvation in terms of historical revelation. Yet while it is unlikely that al-Sijistānī failed to take note of this difficulty himself, he does not seem to address it directly in his works.

For al-Sijistānī the person who is to become the Messiah has already come but the time of *kashf* or unveiling has not. Due to the critically important nature of Muḥammad's era in terms of historical development and the perfection of the physical form of the divine message, a special circumstance has occurred in which there is to be a second set of seven "deputies" (*khulafā'*) to carry out the work of the *da'wa* between the first appearance of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as imam and the second when he reappears as Messiah. Al-Sijistānī preserves in his statements about these deputies a carefully formulated distinction between them and the regular imams (or *mutimms*). This may have been a tentative compromise on his part, as he nowhere indicates explicitly what rank he would see in the *khilāfa* as opposed to the *imāma*. The *khulafā'* for him are the reigning Fatimid caliphs and they share the same noble genealogy as Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl.<sup>32</sup> Quite possibly he had not formally recognized their authority to the same degree as he would have an earlier imam only because the situation in regard to them was historically unique and without precedent. It was also temporary and thus about to come to an end.

The concept of *qā'im* (messiah) and the *qiyāma* (day of resurrection) is, for

al-Sijistānī, an urgent matter, not something remote and far in the future. Unlike a later Ismaili writer such as al-Kirmānī who stressed an interpretation of *Qur'ān* 15: 87 (“*wa la-qad ataynāka sab'an min al-mathānī wa al-qur'āna al-'aẓīma*”) “We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty *Qur'ān*” which has the “seven oft-repeated” indicate a repeating series of seven imams, al-Sijistānī allows only one extra set of seven.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the advent of the Messiah is close at hand.

Despite recognizing a set of seven quasi-imams for the period of Muḥammad, al-Sijistānī is clear about the position of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and the expectation of his reappearance as the Messiah.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, his description of that expected event went undeveloped in the works now available except for a few general remarks.<sup>35</sup> Once he says, for example, that the theme of The Hour (*al-sā'a*) is to be fully discussed in a portion now lost of his *Ihbat al-nubūwa*.<sup>36</sup> More importantly in his *al-Iftikhār* he reports that the question of whether the power of God ceases when creation ends (at the resurrection) was answered in his *al-Bishāra*.<sup>37</sup> In one place, however, he provides a stunning image that seems to crystallize his concept of resurrection. There he likens the history of mankind to a fetus in the womb of its mother. There are, he says, seven distinct stages in its growth and development and then in the final phase it emerges. The picture he presents has mankind as a species growing in the womb of history. Man undergoes six successive cycles of development – one for each of the lawgiving prophets – until the coming of the Messiah, the seventh stage, at which point history will end and he will be born into the light of paradise.<sup>38</sup>

When that time comes and when the veil is lifted, knowledge will be all that remains. Faith, al-Sijistānī maintains, is knowledge and understanding; its pillars are (1) the confession of the tongue, (2) understanding in the heart, (3) works, and (4) pure knowledge, but the first three are invalid without the fourth.<sup>39</sup> The eight gates of paradise are (1) understanding of the body, (2) understanding of the composite (= physical) world, (3) understanding of the laws of bodies, (4) understanding the scripture of earlier messengers, (5) understanding the customary practice of the prophets, (6) understanding the laws that were obligatory for earlier peoples, (7) understanding the sublime world and what it contains as God's hierarchy, and (8) understanding *tawḥīd* by denial and affirmation.<sup>40</sup> The two key Arabic words are *'ulūm* and *ma'rifa* (knowledge and understanding). Salvation follows the acquisition of this true knowledge. “We say,” al-Sijistānī states, “that God has blessed people with no greater blessing than with the intellect He gave them . . . By it we are saved from the darkness of nature.”<sup>41</sup> Eternal pleasure belongs to the intelligible realm, the world of intellect; the reward of paradise cannot be composed of physical pleasure because they are truncated and discontinuous.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the *dawr al-satr*, the Messiah, the *qā'im*, will bring a reward that will consist of “intellectual goods” (*al-fawā'id al-'aqlīya*).<sup>43</sup> “The resurrection of man will then be commensurate with his knowledge and understanding,”<sup>44</sup> and the scales used to weigh this knowledge for the *Ahl al-Ḥaqā'iq* will be heavy. They will reside “in the proximity of the *sābiq* (intellect) which is

the Garden of the Refuge" (*jannat al-ma'wā* [Qur'ān 53: 15]). By contrast the "people of error" (*Ahl al-Bāṭil*) will remain "in the proximity of nature which is a level of lowness."<sup>45</sup>

These comments about specific problems in defining either resurrection or salvation do not adequately resolve the issue of how to combine the two. One idea remains to be discussed. Among al-Sijistānī's few remarks about the Messiah (*Qā'im*), there is an interesting suggestion that seems to indicate that the *Qā'im* is in himself the ultimate perfection of man and of soul. An interpretation of what he says indicates that, in the person of the Messiah, the soul moves at last from a constant state of potential existence to that of actuality (from *qūwa* to *fi'l*).<sup>46</sup> In so doing soul, both as universal and as the sum of its parts, escapes from the folly of its material attachments and regains its true world in the higher realm alongside intellect. But since he also admits that the motion of soul is infinite, the quandary continues and the paradise of al-Sijistānī must always remain theoretical.

## **Epilogue**

### **The use and control of reason**





## Epilogue: The use and control of reason

Throughout the preceding discussions, al-Sijistānī continued to receive the benefit of most doubts in the conflict between looking at him as a thinker and philosopher and as an exponent of a highly partisan ideology. At this point, however, as a way of bringing a conclusion to this study of his writings and his place in Islamic intellectual history, it is important to restate some basic problems and to examine them from the negative side. In so doing those doubts inevitably arise again, this time not to be ignored or glossed over.

In searching for the Neoplatonist within his writings, elements of his Ismaili teachings took a less prominent place than they might when viewed from a wider and more comprehensive perspective. By isolating this one element in al-Sijistānī's thought, other issues were left unexplained or, at the least, understated. However, the philosophical foundations of this form of Shiism were merged intricately in a fabric far more complicated than the previous analysis disclosed. Even so certain tensions in that material – such as those between philosophy and history, between scientific inquiry and revelation, between tradition and authority – were already so naturally graphic they were hard to conceal. They are intrinsic to the kind of partisan ideology espoused by the Ismailis, even if and when that partisanship comprises within it major philosophical ideas which themselves have separate intellectual importance.

It is simply true that al-Sijistānī did not aim ultimately to liberate but rather to control and that meant to restrict knowledge by denying free access to it. The Ismaili practice of *ta'wīl* is a technique of esotericism; it is a theory of a secret epistemology – one guarded and protected by those few who are privy to it. This is a serious charge against him and his colleagues in the *da'wa*. Al-Sijistānī's wish was to bring philosophy into the service of a religious mission to which he had pledged his prior allegiance. And for philosophy to be religious in this context, it could not be free of the narrow, restraining forces that made it serve a particular sacred purpose.

This negative view of al-Sijistānī's interest in philosophy is important, in part, because it raises critical questions – many not yet properly vetted in this study – about the relationship between esotericism and rationality. Esotericism is a belief that all outward forms of knowledge, whether sacred scripture or formal

philosophy, mirror darkly a hidden, less accessible meaning that alone explains them. While it does not automatically preclude a rational understanding of the universe and its contents, the critical question revolves around the rules for investigating the subtle and unobvious realm that comprises the esoteric and the secret. In other words what is the canon according to which the *ta'wīl* operates? Is it known rationally or not?

Many philosophers readily admitted that an accurate knowledge of the true reality of things cannot be obtained by the senses. Sensation generates illusion; it is an untrustworthy witness. The investigation of what actually exists must go beyond such obvious information. Science is, therefore, by its very nature an esoteric enterprise, since it proceeds via the intellect and intellect is normally elusive to ordinary experience. Rationality, properly so called, using this theory, is not the product of sensation and the outward manifestation of things. But the Ismailis, at least theoretically, were not merely Platonists, subscribing to some concepts of "ideas," as this view implies. Their notions of truth and reality require more than recognition of the difference between sense impressions and intellect. True, intellect provides the key to rational understanding, but in what way and by what standard? The Ismailis equate the realm of intellect with the realm of spiritual being and the angels. Rationality, for them, hinges on the existence of a spiritual hierarchy that does more than simply emanate goodness and reality. Such a hierarchy demanded a notion of authority – an authority that controls access to certain privileged forms of knowledge. The question about esotericism, thus, leads to the following dilemma: if the ecclesiastical authority, to which the Ismailis pledged absolute obedience, defines right and wrong, good and bad, truth and falsity, as it did in al-Sijistānī's world, and if that authority follows a strictly hierarchical arrangement, does real philosophy and rationality retain any place at all? Rationality must, of course, presume the operation of reason and of reasoning. But, except as an investigation of what has and has not been decided by those in power, the kind of authority that lies at the heart of Ismaili esotericism forbids true inquiry. Reason is reduced to dogma, or so it appears when regarded from this new perspective.

Long after al-Sijistānī, al-Ghazzālī took the Ismailis to task for their reliance on *ta'wīl*. He quite rightly pointed out that, if there are no fixed rules by which it operates, it leads to chaos and anarchy. And, moreover, any *ta'wīl* may require a second *ta'wīl*. To have discerned the hidden meaning of one symbol or one term might, and in fact most often does, bring on the necessity of understanding the result by yet another act of interpretation. The product of interpretation requires an interpretation itself. When does the process end? Can this process be endless and still be productive of truth? Rationality would seem to demand a conclusion rather than an infinite regress.

The Ismaili response, of course, is an appeal to authority. Free, personal exercise of the right to perform *ta'wīl* does not bring with it certitude; that comes only from adherence to God's divine guidance as provided on earth and in history by the lawgiving prophets and those who were chosen to stand in their place. The

two doctrines are intimately related; *ta'wīl* – the interpretive act – and *nubūwa* – apostolic prophecy – are the halves of one whole. Interpretation requires authority; authority confirms interpretation.

The philosophers, even those who subscribe to a form of esotericism like Plato, Proclus and Democritus,<sup>1</sup> possessed, in the Ismaili mind, dubious credentials because they had eluded prophetic authority. Their historical position was out of order and anomalous. If it were otherwise, the philosophers would require serious attention and greater respect than the Ismailis ever gave them. The achievements they had made on their own would be credible and in little or no need of revision according to the special guidance of the *da'wa*. And this is a right which might be extended to other self-declared thinkers as well. As a result the very rationale of the imamate would lose its force; Shiism would cease to be what it is.

At one level, al-Sijistānī had tried to preclude this contrary approach by suggesting that to speculate about the hidden, esoteric meanings of scripture and of the universe, whether as a whole or a series of particulars, is, in fact, a science. Its method is *ta'wīl*, an operation the mind performs when it seeks to obtain certitude – what the Ismailis call *tahqīq*. Philosophy, thus, becomes a process of analysis; it works by reversion, by returning to constituent elements, by seeking spiritual meaning in moving from the mundane to the sacred, by discovering the intellectual realities and truths that explain profane reality. At best it is a continuing operation and at each stage another more profound stage lies ahead. But, while al-Sijistānī insists on this, he never actually releases either himself or his readers from the grip of an overriding chain of authorities who govern this process. Interpretation – the act of applying *ta'wīl* – is not ultimately rational at all. Because it always seems to be merely hypothetical and never actual, his supposed analytical methodology remains suspect, and al-Sijistānī, like the other Ismailis, in the end, refuses to regard philosophy as a real hermeneutical tool.

On the other hand if this is so, then why should any Ismaili pursue science in the first place? Why study works of philosophy, especially those of foreign origin, rather than simply reject them altogether? Why bring such material into the teachings of the Islamic mission and have Islam propound a view of the world based on such material? For *dā'īs* like al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī, this was not a matter of doubt. It is clearly what happened. There is, therefore, an undeniable paradox in the Ismaili attitude in that they both seek and reject philosophy at the same time.

For all Muslims the origin of philosophy unquestionably lay outside the sphere of prophetic religious history, and the subsequent recognition and absorption of it in the Islamic intellectual tradition required more than a simple acceptance of a few elements of philosophical thought. It demanded, in addition, an explanation of where it had come from and why was that bit of geography and its indigenous culture not a prominent factor in sacred history. Many Islamic scholars took the position that philosophy offered nothing of value and therefore might be dismissed without further discussion. Those upholding this point-of-view may or may not have espoused ideas and ways of thinking which we know

now to be based on philosophy. What characterizes them is an unequivocal refusal to recognize philosophy, as such, in any form. Other scholars, however, wanted a different result. In general the supporters of the opposite view are all, in one way or another, the proponents of philosophy, although quite a number of them expressed neutrality in the debate between revelation and philosophy. Some took an even more ambivalent stance which involved rejecting the philosophers and their Greek ancestors but at the same time accepting much of what they had said, not just as ideas in the air, but as expressed in known philosophical or quasi-philosophical texts.<sup>2</sup>

Like others, the Ismaili writers discussed in this study were indeed attracted to Hellenistic learning and to the ways of explaining nature and the cosmos provided therein. But among other Muslims who, while accepting and using philosophical ideas, nevertheless rejected the philosophers, the early Ismailis seem to stand out both in their adamant refusal to admit the subjective value of philosophy and yet in being conspicuous for the amount of philosophical doctrine that permeates much of their writing. The ambiguity of the Ismaili position is unusual, not in their rationality and methods of reasoning, much of which appears elsewhere as well, but in their close connection to the philosophical tradition – a tradition that they themselves admitted is, in many ways, the source of both doctrines and ideas in their writings. Unlike the Mu'tazilites, for example, whose pronouncements reveal the taint of ancient philosophy but who did not confess to a direct connection, the Ismaili writers, here considered, did recognize such an affinity.

The philosophical element in Ismaili literature in this period, moreover, follows a quite specific and narrow channel within the Greek legacy as a whole. In distinction to most *kalām*, it is almost impossible to argue for a non-textual transmission as would be necessary to prove the disinterest of the Ismailis in the details of the philosophical tradition. Rather, these Ismaili writers knowingly both accepted and rejected philosophy, fully aware of the ambiguity and perhaps paradox of their position. They belong therefore among the proponents of philosophy despite their undeniably split loyalty. Yet because this tendency is so self-evident, their careful, studied avoidance of philosophy and the philosophers seems awkwardly ambivalent. As they eagerly sought knowledge from all sources, they nonetheless argued that such knowledge is valid only if it comes from a single wellspring flowing from only one source. The divine hierarchy determines what is and what is not ultimately acceptable regardless of how clever and brilliant the Greeks may have been.

It may be that other Islamic thinkers took an approach similar to this peculiar tactic of the Ismailis, but few, if any, were so self-conscious and deliberate about it. Not all Ismailis, of course, wrote on philosophical subjects or used philosophical materials, but those who did present a curious picture. On the one hand they claim an exclusive form of knowledge based on an authoritarian esotericism and yet on the other their writings betray a close attachment to specific texts which were themselves understood to provide ancient, philosophical teachings. In terms

of the general strategies for dealing with the historical problem of philosophy, the Ismailis' solution is puzzling.

In the earlier chapters that explored al-Sijistānī and his predecessors' interest in texts bearing a Greek or pseudo-Greek label, some details were given about this problem. From the positive perspective of al-Sijistānī's most philosophical concepts, his response is already known and was apparent in his use of Neoplatonic thinking. He was attracted to this form of philosophy because it was theologically useful. It is also possible that he was himself personally interested in certain philosophical problems. Here, by contrast, it is necessary to admit as well that, in reviewing the whole of his writing, as with much else produced by the Ismailis, there is in it, in addition to some valuable philosophical material, a great deal of weak and unsophisticated argumentation. This tends to provide a different answer about the role of foreign knowledge, prompting a more cautious approach.

Much of this other material – where it pretends to some degree of rationality rather than being simply a citation of *Qur'ān* or *ḥadīth* – is best classed among the pseudo-sciences and cabalism. This is often so clearly the case it is quite possible for many medieval and modern critics to ignore the genuinely philosophical elements in favor of this less attractive, more mundane material and to view Ismaili thought accordingly. Ismaili literature is full of all sorts of information incorporated often without adequate reason. And this leads to a point about Ismaili learning in general. Both the pseudo-scientific and the validly philosophical doctrines of the Ismailis serve a similar function. Both provided substance for their esoteric claims. While this does not excuse, for example, what is frequently a blatant indulgence in cabalistic games or in the pursuit of alchemical magic, it does offer an explanation of motive. The Ismaili authors required doctrines about the world and its mysteries that they could seize upon as special possessions of their own *ecclesia*. The *da'wa* needed knowledge from which to construct an esoteric teaching. Some members among them chose the route of cabalism or of various forms of occult science; but others preferred philosophy, or what was then taken as philosophy. At times both appear in the same treatise. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, whichever of these and other avenues they followed, the incentive in almost all cases was based on a vested interest in securing a privileged form of knowledge. Philosophy served this end as did other types of information.

But while philosophy was employed toward a specific goal, did its practitioners violate its canons completely? How successfully they incorporated the philosophy they selected and in what ways remains an important issue. Was the philosophical component of Ismaili thought tainted for this reason alone? Is al-Sijistānī nevertheless a creditable philosopher regardless of his motive? An answer will necessarily be subjective but even so worthwhile. This kind of assessment is obviously subject to change and depends on the state of research at a given moment. In al-Sijistānī's case there are a few special problems that must be reviewed again.

One difficulty not sufficiently stressed earlier but which persists in examining al-Sijistānī's contributions is the lack of published material both from his own

writings and that of other Ismailis of his time. The modern rediscovery of Ismaili thought is a recent phenomenon. Chance certainly played a role in determining what texts appeared, and how, when and in what order. Al-Sijistānī is best known to date for fragments of his *Nuṣṣa*, a paraphrase of his *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, his *al-Yanābīʿ*, and *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*. Not only is it possible that these treatises distort his philosophical credentials, but his most important book, *al-Maḡālīd*, is not among them. As essential as it is because it is relatively late and by any account the most comprehensive of his works, *al-Maḡālīd* remains accessible only in manuscript.

Another type of problem belongs to the area of preservation. Al-Nasafī's *Maḥṣūl*, which might provide the most interesting data on earlier Ismaili philosophizing, is lost and must be judged solely from scattered quotations. This difficulty applies equally and more to lost works or other authors, some of whom are barely known now even by name. If al-Sijistānī is in himself a thinker worthy of modern recovery and re-examination, others might have been as well. But even if a complete picture of earlier Ismaili philosophical activity shows that al-Sijistānī was only one member of a larger intellectual movement and that much of what he said repeated what the others had already said, such a conclusion would at this point be only speculation. A thousand years of Ismaili tradition have preserved texts selectively. That tradition places al-Sijistānī on center stage. The best to be hoped for, therefore, is a relatively full understanding of what al-Sijistānī himself wrote and in this he must represent a major portion of the intellectual branch of early Ismailism.

Beyond these problems modern scholarship often views the work of the Ismaili *dāʿīs* tendentiously. Henry Corbin, who more than any other recent investigator deserves credit for publishing and analyzing the writings of al-Sijistānī, was far less interested in the philosophical base of this material than in its esoteric methods. For Corbin the operation of *taʾwīl*, which is admittedly vital to Ismaili ways of understanding all things, whether scripture or philosophy, is the one prime element in their doctrine that deserves notice and recovery. Corbin was not entirely blind to the Neoplatonism, only personally indifferent. In emphasizing the methodology of interpretive analysis and particularly its role in the construction of an esoteric tradition within Islam, he singled out what was, possibly, the most contentious and troublesome doctrine in their whole system. Obviously, all approaches to the esoteric are not as suspect and did not run the same risks as that of the Ismailis. Corbin has wanted to see their attachment to the *taʾwīl* in its most open and respectable light, as a way of returning to the sacred and of finding meaning in a liturgy of symbols. His preoccupation may well, in part, genuinely mirror that of writers like al-Sijistānī in whom he discovered a common interest. But in this sense hermeneutics and philosophy are not essentially harmonious halves of the same activity but rather opposing forces each with its own rules leading disconnectedly in opposite directions. Because *taʾwīl* does not follow formal logic, it is not judged by the criterion of reason and thus philosophy offers a minimal benefit to its practitioners.

One response would be to change the definition of philosophy and thereby to enlarge its scope. Modern philosophy has obviously accomplished that task and is no longer confined within the narrow limits set by the Greek legacy. In the medieval Islamic world this was also attempted but primarily in a period long after al-Sijistānī's time. Given the Ismaili position which, in any case, has little direct concern for philosophy as such, to propose that it alter its ancient premises in order to accommodate another mode of logic seems out of the question. Philosophy came into the Ismaili realm from a foreign source and, in dealing with it, al-Sijistānī and his predecessors continued for the most part to regard it with xenophobic suspicion.

Confronting philosophy was, nonetheless, of crucial importance for some of the more intellectually inclined members of the *da'wa* and their endeavor in this regard must be taken seriously. Not all Ismailis who wrote about *ta'wīl* also composed works containing philosophy. It was quite possible to expound on the *ẓāhir/bāṭin* distinction at length and to provide numerous examples of *ta'wīl* in action without philosophizing. A prime example is the *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*<sup>3</sup> of the Fatimid judge al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān but many others exist. Therefore, the early Ismaili interest in philosophy was one of choice. Not only did the theory of *ta'wīl* not require it necessarily, but the disposition for it was not widespread. This raises again the problem of what, in the minds of the Ismaili students of philosophy, was to be gained from it.

The philosophizing writers knew, first of all, that they faced a source of knowledge that possessed a considerably attractive quality for many Muslims. At the very least it constituted a threat against their own claim to exclusive truth. For them philosophy could not simply be ignored. That would have set up a conflict within the Ismaili sphere between two competing forms of rationality, one understood to be "Ismaili" and another belonging to scholars from the outside. The question, then, was not merely one of reason versus revelation but of what was, in their eyes, reason versus reason. Having admitted that revelation requires constant interpretation and that for all outward expression there is an inner meaning, all Ismailis were committed to the search for special knowledge. To ignore one type of it, especially an important one, threatened to marginalize the movement as a whole. In their approach to scholarship, the earlier *dā'īs* exhibited little of the hesitation and precautionary secrecy so much a feature of later Ismailism. It was important for them to be seen by opponent and friend alike as comprehensive, as people in pursuit of an inclusive scholarship rather than exclusive, even if inclusion meant control and rejection. Rejection, in their own minds, had to be the result of knowledge and not ignorance. Instead, they sought to co-opt philosophy by denying that it possesses or could have possessed independent value. This approach required the subjective rejection of philosophy, or more exactly philosophers as such, while not along the way losing all attachment to philosophical concepts.

To accomplish their peculiar form of co-option, the Ismaili writers resorted to only one of the various traditions within philosophy – that of Neoplatonism. What

they took from it, moreover, was quite specific. Some features of this Neoplatonism conform broadly to ancient forms of it, but others apparently do not. More to the point, while a variety of textual evidence does exist that suggests possible origins of these doctrines, it is certain that the Ismaili writers relied on a set of texts from that tradition which were themselves of ambiguous and doubtful origin. The works so far proven to have a special relationship in this regard are the *Pseudo-Ammonius* and the *Longer Theologia*, both of which present numerous problems concerning form, content, and origin. Yet both are clearly linked to Ismaili Neoplatonism and to the Ismaili attitude to philosophy and its history.

For the Ismailis the problem was to find evidence that within philosophy there had been confusion and chaos. The philosophers, they argued, held so many opposing opinions they could not, on their own, know truth from falsity. By providing a catalog of philosophical sectarianism, the Ismaili writers could analyze that material with their own standard of “guidance” and show how there was truth in philosophy but also how only properly oriented persons could find it. Instead these Ismailis – at least some of them – sought to co-opt philosophical knowledge by appropriating that portion of it that was more or less congenial to their own basic outlook. It was no accident, then, that the Ismaili writers found what they wanted in a limited selection of quasi-philosophical texts such as the *Pseudo-Ammonius* and the *Longer Theologia*, and in the ambivalent context surrounding these works. What appealed to al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī was not the authenticity of standard philosophical works but only certain types of information and concepts found in those with a dubious relationship to that tradition.

Neoplatonism, then, gave the Ismailis an alternate road to philosophy – one that they did not need to fear. It did not traverse the formal ground of philosophy as laid down by Plato and, most especially, Aristotle. In fact it may not have carried the label “philosophy” at all. But to have noticed this disposition does not also imply that, in the debate between revelation and philosophy, the doctrines proposed by al-Sijistānī and his colleagues were not deeply influenced by foreign ideas. The opposite was the case. It was necessary, accordingly, not to deny this outside link or to pretend that it did not exist. Confessing that some philosophers upheld the truth did not invalidate that truth but instead made philosophy as a whole suspect because it had been vain and amorphous in its attempt to reach its claim to truth.

As the intellectually inclined members of the *da'wa* sought to incorporate philosophy, however, an internal struggle was almost inevitable. Various *dā'īs* dealt, first, with new sources of information and ways of thinking coming to them from the outside world and then, second, with competing systems within their own ranks. Allowing the broadest scope for their intellectual activity satisfied some more than others. To found a sectarian doctrine upon the kind of philosophical theology that al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī advocated was dangerous. On the one hand it provided a scholarly tone and an intellectual respectability for the *da'wa*'s esoteric message. On the other it made that message inaccessible to the average Muslim.



Meanwhile the *da'wa* had made itself necessary because only an elite, properly trained body of specialists could comprehend and propagate these doctrines.

If the Ismailis managed to convince themselves that they could co-opt the philosophical tradition, those who did also felt themselves more than equal to the task of authenticating its doctrines. Co-option meant control and these authors professed their own superiority. Whether they could do so in fact is another, quite interesting question. Were they actually qualified to make this judgment? For al-Nasafi too little of his writing remains. If he was truly skilled at philosophical exposition, as is implied by his reputation, the surviving evidence of his pronouncements does not really establish or support such a conclusion, although it does not deny it either. Al-Sijistānī is another matter. About him a judgment is possible even though, again, it is essential to consider several factors, personal philosophical acumen being only one.

Certainly, one major dimension of his activity was defensive and apologetic. It involved an effort to reinforce existing dogmas rather than to propose new ones. If so how, then, can his work receive special attention in isolation from numerous other contributions of fellow *dā'īs*? And if he, through those books and pamphlets of his that survive, merely represents an ideology common to many other Ismailis of his time, is it worth stopping to examine his writings in terms of history of philosophy? For that matter was he unusually gifted as a thinker, even within the parameters he set for himself? Probably the answer to these questions will go both ways in response to yet other considerations.

Nevertheless, few could argue that al-Sijistānī was an outstanding philosopher, even though his contributions are highly significant in the history of Neoplatonism, especially in its influence (and lack of it) on Islamic thought. Philosophy followed its own course in the Islamic world – one dominated by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā and defined by Peripatetic doctrine. Al-Sijistānī was not entirely off that path but not really on it either. There are elements in al-Fārābī's doctrines not dissimilar to those of al-Sijistānī, just as, in many ways, Ibn Sīnā's less easily explained divergences from al-Fārābī appear suspiciously Ismaili in nature. A common nexus did exist. But whereas the Philosophers were willing to champion philosophy, al-Sijistānī and his fellow *dā'īs* keep their distance.

This judgment goes beyond recognizing the inherent difference between the Aristotelian tendency of al-Fārābī and the Neoplatonism of al-Sijistānī. Neoplatonism is not essential to Ismaili thought. Although the early writers tried to make it seem natural in the context of Ismaili doctrine, another philosophical system could serve as well. Al-Kirmānī, in fact, took the teachings of al-Fārābī and fashioned from them a quite respectable explanation of Ismaili theory. Therefore, al-Sijistānī and his predecessors were not driven to the material they borrowed by philosophical necessity. On the contrary they tended to follow a logic of their own choice which, in fact, often led them away from pure philosophy to a number of curious results such as the doctrine of double negation in reference to God's transcendence. While its link to Neoplatonic theories of transcendence remains important, it is, like other results of al-Sijistānī's work, a concept of

limited philosophical significance, in part because philosophy had relatively little to do with reaching such a result.

Al-Sijistānī's relationship to philosophy was obviously strained, and he was never comfortable outside of the specific problems that arose from a context defined by his partisan Shiite predilections. The reason for this grew out of the conflict between the free rationality of philosophical inquiry and the hierarchical authority demanded by the *da'wa*. Nevertheless, it is clear, on the other hand, that al-Sijistānī's contributions are not intellectually insignificant. His efforts in adapting Neoplatonic ideas to fit Shiite doctrine deserve study for different reasons, only one of which relates to the history of philosophy, but that one is both interesting and important.

The concept of double negation is but one of the many solutions the Ismaili writers proposed to answer a number of theological problems. It illustrates how philosophy served a non-philosophical purpose. But it is also a good example of how a doctrinal problem was solved by a Neoplatonic inspiration, only to generate new ones, such as that of creation, for example. Al-Sijistānī's voluntaristic concept of creation by the "will" of God did not accord well with his basic metaphysical position. He was always better at expounding the details of a single argument than in facing the larger implications of various philosophical doctrines. His intellectual position was not philosophically coherent. Philosophy, therefore, provided no panacea for its Ismaili adapters, but that was true both for many of its proponents as well as for those like al-Sijistānī who only borrowed from it.

Quite likely the Ismaili writers knew that and thus fully appreciated how difficult their position was. For them an esoteric teaching had to exist or it had to be found. That much was fundamental to Shiism in general and the Ismaili cause in particular. Their whole enterprise was thus dedicated to the establishment and preservation of an alternate form of Islam, one based on a specific teaching and backed by an organized hierarchy of teachers and authorities. The Ismailis regarded the sacrament of Islam to be the knowledge inherited, preserved and spread by their *da'wa*. Although the Islamic world did not in the end accept such a vision of how to govern itself and how to determine what Islam is and is not, that does not make the attempt less interesting. In the fourth/tenth century the Ismailis constituted a threat both politically and intellectually. The combined manifestations of their movement – that is, the Qarmatians and the Fatimids added together – for a time included a wide selection of Islamic society.

Therefore, despite recognizing problems in al-Sijistānī's intellectual position and the weaknesses in his use of philosophy, approaching his career from the vantage of his involvement in an ideological movement lends importance to what he had to say precisely because of its broader context. Just as his philosophical attachment to Neoplatonism is of greater significance for the history of Neoplatonism than for philosophy as a whole, so too is his role in the Ismaili *da'wa* vis à vis other branches of it which refused to accede to his intellectual standards and to accept his attempt to co-opt the Greek tradition.

Moreover, whatever the truth of the antagonism between philosophy and the

Ismaili claims, al-Sijistānī is simply no paradigm of the ordinary Ismaili *dā'ī*. His writings do, of course, contain most elements of Ismailism but his proclivity for explaining problems by adapting them to philosophical solutions was not necessarily a standard Ismaili response. It is essential, therefore, to look at him and those *dā'īs* like him as the proponents of an intellectually complete view of Islam from within an Ismaili perspective. To achieve this goal, al-Sijistānī had to manipulate both his Islamic, Shiite heritage *and* the philosophical legacy. He wanted a certain result from both that was not automatically the dominant and natural one either would ordinarily yield. It is likely that Shiism was, for him, less easily changed or altered. The tradition ran too deep and was firmly established long before his time. It, moreover, was adequately taught by the previous *dā'īs*, except perhaps in a few details. Thus al-Sijistānī and his colleagues made no more than minor adjustments with respect to the Islamic background they all shared as members of their movement as a whole. Much of what they wrote was dictated by these considerations. Philosophy was another matter. By not recognizing it overtly, they gained a kind of freedom. The techniques of esoteric methodology, further, allowed them to take apart what they saw as the facade of formal philosophy. At least in their own minds, they thought they were reducing philosophical systems to individual elements and choosing among them only those of value. The action of *ta'wīl* operates on both scripture and philosophy – that is, philosophy taken in the sense of a formal structure, i.e. a philosophy.

Another possibility is that al-Sijistānī actually meant what he often seems to say about discovering the meaning behind either the outward wording of any statement or the plain physical act of a given ritual. This assumption contradicts one voiced earlier. Was he sincere in advocating the search for spiritual and intellectual values? Did he intend this to be undertaken by individuals and thus pursued independently of the *da'wa*? That remains highly unlikely but, within the establishment he belonged to, he may well have felt free to investigate philosophical problems as he personally saw fit. Above, this possibility was denied because, for every claim that he makes about the hermeneutical act, he also eventually insists on a context for such acts that emphasizes the need for authority and proper guidance. However, there is nothing new and unusual about this problem of authority. Many religious organizations maintain that individuals must determine meaning for themselves even though they also sternly assert a principle of guidance and control.

Thus, while al-Sijistānī teaches a concept of hierarchy and authority that requires absolute obedience, he nevertheless promotes a personal search for understanding. An Ismaili must not only re-enact each ritual moment but must find and comprehend its meaning as well. Surely there is a valid point to the Ismaili argument about interpretation. Ritual must contain within it some meaning and significance and there needs to be a bridge from one to the other. For the Ismailis scripture, ritual, and the law all necessitate a complex approach; each demands the fullest kind of compliance both physically and spiritually; and even more, for the significance of each thing depends on the accumulation of meanings

that surrounds it. In al-Sijistānī's view the fullness of a given thing's dossier in terms of the various symbolic connotations it includes determines that thing's rank and position. He advocates a mode of reasoning by the accumulation of significant meaning. If philosophy helps add to one's appreciation of anything – that is, to enlarge the scope of the meaning it conveys – then that is not only an important addition but quite possibly a necessary one as well. Viewing reality from only one perspective severely limits the understanding of it. The operation of *ta'wīl* contributes at least one additional dimension, perhaps even more. In applying the "science" of *ta'wīl*, philosophy cannot be accepted as the sole avenue to follow in uncovering the various layers of truth. It is, however, one among others. When used carefully and with full knowledge of the divine grace stemming from the guiding authority of the *da'wa*, it achieves a proper, rather than dominating, place in intellectual life.

# Notes

## 1 The Ismaili message and its philosophers

- 1 The most important studies of the general as well as some specific features of the *da'wa* in the period in question are those of W. Madelung, S. M. Stern, W. Ivanow, and A. Hamdani for which consult the general bibliography. Nearly all of this material was carefully summarized by F. Daftary in his highly important *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1990), particularly pp. 136–38, 192–95, 212–15, and 224–32.
- 2 The extent of this literature is best understood by consulting Ismail K. Poonawala's *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, Undena Publications, 1977) which largely replaces all earlier catalogs and lists, such as W. Ivanow's *Ismaili Literature: a Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963).
- 3 For the Ismailis this was also the case of the first three "rightly guided" and the Umayyad caliphs who preceded the Abbasids.
- 4 One of them, al-Kirmānī, visited the capital of the empire during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh at the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century but did not long remain there before returning to his previous abode in hostile Iraq.
- 5 The standard alternate form of the Arabic *nisba* for someone from Sijistan is Sijzī which is equally correct. Al-Nasafī also can have the form al-Nakhshabī. For purposes of this study I prefer al-Sijistānī and al-Nasafī, in part because I believe these present less difficulty for non-Arabic and non-Persian speakers, but this is a personal choice. I have the impression also that al-Sijistānī is the form used almost exclusively by the modern Ismaili community where his works are still read and copied, whereas al-Kirmānī, for example, and many of the older authorities use al-Sijzī.
- 6 Madelung has separated the major early Iranian figures into what he labels the "Persian School" ("Die persische Schule"), in his "Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre," (*Der Islam* 37 [1967]: 43–135), pp. 101–14. See also Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs* pp. 234–45.
- 7 In general the best and most comprehensive scholarly investigation of all of these problems is the study by Madelung just mentioned ("Das Imamāt"). Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, supports the same conclusions.
- 8 It is remarkable that the earliest evidence, a treatise no longer extant, but which is clearly a refutation of the Qarmatians by al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, an Imami scholar who died in 260/873–874, points to a date close to the time of the end of the apparent line of imams of the *Imāmīya*. Was the rapid development of an Ismaili *da'wa* somehow

stimulated by the crises of its sister branch of Shiah? See Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, particularly, p. 117.

- 9 Namely Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus who are the lawgiving, speaker-prophets. They initiated, each in turn, the five eras previous to that of Muḥammad.
- 10 In broader Shiite parlance, however, it does often indicate the imam. On this see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 126–28.
- 11 In fact al-Mahdī's own claim, not only denied the Messiahship of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, but states that he was descended from Ismā'īl's brother 'Abdallāh. On this problem in general, see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 108–16, 126–29.
- 12 On the Qarmatian problem in particular see the article by Madelung in *EP* ("Karmaṭī") which in turn is based on his more extensive "Fatimiden und Bahrain-qarmaten," *Der Islam* 34 (1959): 34–88.
- 13 The so-called "reform" of al-Mu'izz was first identified by Madelung in his "Das Imamāt," 86–101. The evidence, from treatises by al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, and al-Mu'izz himself, is reviewed again by Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 177–80.
- 14 For details about the early *dā'īs* and their activities in the areas of most concern here, see the study of S. M. Stern entitled "The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxania," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23 (1960): 56–90, now available in his *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1983), pp. 189–233. All references hereafter will be to the reprinted text. In this study Stern relies in the first place on the version of events given by Niẓām al-Mulk in his *Siyāsat-nāma* and adds to it all the known evidence from other records including particularly that of Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī's *al-Farq bayna al-fīraq*, al-Maqrīzī's history of the Fatimids, and al-Daylamī's polemic against the Ismailis, as well as al-Bustī and Rashīd al-Dīn.

A significant result of the lack of historical information about the Iranian *da'wa* is the need of modern scholars to rely on the few surviving reports collected by non-Ismaili observers, noteworthy among them an early refutation of Ismaili teaching by the Zaydi, Mu'tazilite Abū al-Qāsim al-Bustī, himself a close disciple of the more famous Mu'tazilite Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār. To a degree remarkable among heresiographers and polemicists, this critic possessed access to the literature of the Ismailis, particularly of those from Iran, like al-Marwazī, al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī. His relatively accurate knowledge of true Ismaili doctrine, as it had been expressed in authentic works by them, coupled with the early date of his own refutation (about 400/1000), gives the evidence in his account special importance in view of the lack of it elsewhere. On al-Bustī see Stern, "Al-Bustī," and al-Bustī's own *Kashf asrār al-bāṭiniyya* (ms. Ambrosiana, Milan). Beyond al-Bustī two other reports carry substantial weight. They are, first, the infamous account by Ibn Rizām, written about the middle of the fourth/tenth century, and, second, the composite body of records available from Alamut (or perhaps other Ismaili fortresses) to Rashīd al-Dīn. Both of these sources are, like the work of al-Bustī, in part based on Ismaili materials, though in the case of Ibn Rizām what is authentic and what is deliberately false may never be sorted out.

Unfortunately, for Iran and Iraq even with a full survey of this kind of information, there is little more than a list of names, many of which have no meaning or known significance otherwise.

- 15 The date of al-Sijistānī's death is not known. The evidence is discussed below.

- 16 Most authorities suggest a date of death for al-Kirmānī close to 411/1021 because that is when he revised his *Rāḥat al-'aql* (ed. M. K. Husayn and M. M. Hilmi, Cairo, 1953) and issued it in its final form (p. 20). However, his *al-Riyāḍ* (edited A. Tamer, Beirut, 1960) mentions the imam al-Zāfir, according to the Hamdani ms. which is by far the oldest and most reliable (f. 337v). This is confirmed in the Fyzee ms. In his *Al-Risāla al-waḍī'a fī ma'ālim al-dīn* (Fyzee ms., f. 29v), moreover, he mentions both al-Zāfir and al-Mustaṣṣir which makes it no older than 427/1036. Therefore it appears likely that al-Kirmānī was still alive at the beginning of al-Mustaṣṣir's reign and that while he may have written many of his works in the time of al-Ḥākim or before, he continued to revise them for at least two decades after that imam disappeared.
- 17 In the Iranian provinces as well as others this missionary propaganda also grew into a literary movement when a number of the *dā'īs* began to add written materials to the instruction given by the *da'wa*. The first name recorded in the case of Iran is that of Ghiyāth, a disciple of Aḥmad the son and successor of Khalaf who was himself the founder of the *da'wa* in Rayy. Niẓām al-Mulk reports that this man was well versed in *adab* and that he,

embellished the principles of their doctrine with verses of the Qur'ān, traditions of the Prophet, proverbs of the Arabs, verses and stories, and wrote a book entitled *Kitāb al-bayān*. In this book he mentioned the meaning of prayer, fasting, purity, almsgiving, and other expressions of the Law in a lexicographical manner in order that the Sunnis should not know it. (*Siyāsat-nāma*, ed. Ch. Schefer, Paris, 1891, p. 185; Eng. Trans. H. Darke, New Haven, 1960, p. 215)

Such a book exists now as the work not of Ghiyāth – which is lost – but of his own successor as head of the *da'wa* in Rayy, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī. The latter's *Kitāb al-zīna* could easily be described in the same or similar terms, and possibly there is a close relationship between the two productions.

- 18 The philosophical content of the *Maḥṣūl* – such as the surviving evidence indicates – is discussed later in chapter 3.
- 19 The activities of the Ismaili *da'wa* may be said to begin in the region of Rayy as early as the middle of the third/ninth century and in the area of Khurasan somewhat later, perhaps just before the close of this same century. These dates conform roughly with the establishment of Ismaili missions elsewhere. Ḥamdān Qarmāṭ and his brother-in-law set up a *da'wa* in the region of al-Kufa about 264/877; 'Alī b. al-Faḍl and Ibn Ḥawshab (Maṣṣūr al-Yaman) began their work in the Yemen about 268/881; Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī'ī arrived in North Africa in 280/893; and Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī founded his Bahrayni state in 286/899. In almost all cases the preaching of these first *dā'īs* included an appeal for the recognition of a hidden imam whose rise was expected shortly. The movement was then centrally directed and therefore until the disagreements surrounding the new doctrines proposed by the future 'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī in 286/899 – namely that he would himself henceforth openly proclaim his own imamate rather than hide under a cover – it was designed to serve a common cause.
- 20 The standard account has a line of *dā'īs* follow as if each in turn were chiefs of this particular *da'wa*. Khalaf was succeeded by his son Aḥmad; the latter by Ghiyāth. Ghiyāth ran into opposition from a local theologian and was forced to flee to Khurasan, where he converted a prominent Amir, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marwazī (or al-Marwarrudhī). Sometime later he returned to Rayy and brought into the *da'wa*

- Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, his successor as chief of that mission. On this see Stern, "Missionaries," 195; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, p. 120.
- 21 Stern, *Studies*, pp. 202–3; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 131, 165.
  - 22 Abū Ḥātim's career in the service of the *da'wa* brought him into contact with a number of the prominent political figures of the period. Several in fact supported him and thus must have acceded to the Ismaili cause. Among these for a time was the Amir Mardāwīj in Rayy. A reversal of some kind prompted the anger of Mardāwīj who thereafter persecuted the Ismailis, thus forcing Abū Ḥātim to flee and in flight he died (according to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *Lisān al-mizān* in 322/934–5). See Stern, "Missionaries," 195–204; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 120–21, 131. On his philosophical ideas see below chapter 3.
  - 23 Ms. Hamdani Library. Three portions have been edited and published: *Kitāb al-zīna*. Fasc. I and II edited by H. Hamdani, Cairo, 1957 and 1958. Fasc. III, edited by Abdallah Sallum al-Samarra'i in his *al-Ghulūw wa al-firaq al-ghālīya fī al-ḥadara al-islāmīya* (Baghdad, 1972), pp. 228–312 (corresponding to Hamdani ms. pp. 214–46). Complete Hamdani ms. photocopy ARCE Cairo.
  - 24 The *A'lām al-nubūwa*, ed. by Salah al-Sawy and Gholam-Reza Aavani (Tehran, 1977).
  - 25 The *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* has not been published. See the bibliography for manuscripts. In general see also chapter 3 for an analysis of the contribution of Abū Ḥātim to Ismaili philosophical thought. For its general position within Ismailism, see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 235–38.
  - 26 On al-Balkhī see the article in *El²* by D. M. Dunlop as well as the remarks of Stern, "Missionaries," 218, and E. Rowson, "The Philosopher as Littérateur: Al-Tawḥīdī and his predecessors," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*, 6 (1990): 61–69.
  - 27 *Siyāsāt-nāma*, 187–88; Darke, 218.
  - 28 The *da'wa* was first headed by a certain Abū 'Abdallāh al-Khādim, who was followed in 307/919–920 by Abū Sa'īd al-Sha'rānī, both residing in Nishapur. The latter was put to death during the governorate of Abū Bakr b. Muḥtāj (in office from 321 to 327). Thereupon al-Marwazī assumed the leadership of the *da'wa*, although his own prominence as an Amir and his attachment to the Ismaili cause obviously go back even to the end of the third/ninth century. See Stern, "Missionaries," 216–19; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, p. 122.
  - 29 On al-Nasafī and his *Maḥṣūl*, see in addition to the comments here and in chapter 3 below, Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 40–43 (41). The *Maḥṣūl* was cited and/or quoted in the following works: Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, VI, ed. S. al-Munajjid, Cairo, 1961, p. 95; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, pp. 283, 285, 293; al-Kirmānī, *al-Riyāḍ*; Nāṣir-i Khusrāw, *Khawān al-ikhwān*, ed. al-Khachab, pp. 111, 115 and *Jām' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. Corbin, 171; al-Bustī, *Kashf*; al-Daylamī, *Madhhab al-bāṭinīya*; Abū Tammām, *al-Shajara*; Abū Firās, *al-Idāḥ*; 'Alī b. al-Walīd, *Ḍiyā' al-albāb*.
  - 30 This problem is discussed in detail in chapter 3.
  - 31 *Siyāsāt-nāma*, 187; Darke, 217–23. Also Stern, "Missionaries," 220; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 122–23.
  - 32 There was also alleged to be physical evidence of a crime by him. Ibn al-Nadīm records a story about this period in which al-Nasafī is said to have claimed from the Samanid ruler an "indemnity" payment for the imprisonment of al-Marwazī (the cause



of his death?). The sum in question and its exact purpose caused substantial problems. According to Ibn al-Nadīm the amount was one hundred and nineteen *dīnārs* and each *dīnār* said to be a thousand *dīnārs*. What that means is not clear. Ibn al-Nadīm also reports that the money was to go to the Fatimid ruler of North Africa as head of the movement. The crime is said to have been the discovery of some of the unusual *dīnārs*, still in his possession at the time of his interrogation. What might help explain this incident is the constant question within the movement in this period of whether the *da'wa* was to act on the orders of the Fatimid ruler as imam or on behalf of the concealed Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. In the latter case al-Nasafī would have retained the payment to this imam on the theory that he was some kind of *nā'ib* or delegated agent of the imam in occultation. Al-Bustī curiously refers to a matter of intense debate within the *da'wa* which also concerned al-Nasafī and which involved 119 *dirhams*. As there is no other known reason for this figure of 119 in both accounts, they must be connected. Al-Bustī implies that the Ismailis ordinarily levied a duty on converts in the amount of 119 dirhams. Quite possibly al-Nasafī used that figure in the collection of such a duty from the Samanid Amir but increased it by a multiple of 1,000 due to the rank of the convert. Again, al-Bustī indicates that trouble persisted over whose authority required this levee: Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl or another. He may be indicating in this way differences among the *dā'īs* about which imam commanded their allegiance. *Fihrist* p. 280; Dodge, pp. 467–68. Stern, "Missionaries," 228. Al-Bustī, f. 10v.

- 33 There are also at about this time major developments in the Qarmatian movement: the catastrophe of the Persian pretender taken as the expected Mahdi (319/931) and later renounced and the raid on Mecca during which the Black stone of the Ka'ba was removed (317/930). Both incidences quickly became well known and both hurt the public cause of the Ismailis irreparably. The details surrounding both events are summarized by Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 162–63.
- 34 Persons named Abū Ya'qūb ("the father of Jacob") most often bear the name Ishāq ("Isaac"). Therefore it is common to assume that someone with one of these names also has the other.
- 35 *Siyāsat-nāma*, p. 187; Darke, 217; Stern, "Missionaries," 204.
- 36 Abū al-Qāsim Kāshānī, *Ta'rikh-i ismā'īliya* (Tehran, 1343), p. 20. The key passage reads "*va ba'd az ū pisarash Abū Ya'qūb-rā dar navāḥī-yi Gurgān padīd āmad qaṣd-i ū kardand gurīkhta bi Bukhārā raft va ānjā kushta shud.*" Stern did not consider this evidence.
- 37 It runs as follows:

Banū Ḥammād of Mosul. They were the heads of the *da'wa* in northern Mesopotamia (al-Jazīra) and the adjacent regions on behalf of Abū Ya'qūb, the lieutenant of the Imam, who was residing in Rayy.

The Banū Ḥammād are Abū Muslim b. Ḥammād al-Mawsilī and his brother Abū Bakr; Ibn al-Nadīm lists three of their books. Stern makes a good argument for dating the activity of these *dā'īs* about 320. *Fihrist*, p. 282; Stern, "Missionaries," 204–7.

- 38 Abū 'Abdallāh b. Nafīs was, according to the report,

one of the most important *dā'īs* who was in charge of the capital as a lieutenant of Abū Ya'qūb, who, however, disapproved of him because of certain reports which reached him, so that he sent some Persians to assassinate Ibn Nafīs in his shop. (*Fihrist*, p. 283; Stern, "Missionaries," 207).

- 39 This is his own testimony as given in his *Iftikhār*, chapter on the imamate. The section in question was deleted by Ghalib from his edition. For other references to this work consult the bibliography. See as well Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 83.

- 40 Nāṣir-i Khusrāw, himself an Ismaili writer, remarks on another matter, that,

The following was the opinion about the *barzakh* held by Dihqān, who was the son of the Martyred Shaykh [i.e. al-Nasafī] and was the head of the *jazīra* of Khurasan after Ya'qūb . . . (*Khwān al-ikhwān*, p. 112; quoted by Stern, "Missionaries," 221)

Is this a reference to Abū Ya'qūb as Stern conjectures?

- 41 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, f. 7v.
- 42 *Farq*, p. 283; Stern, "Missionaries," 225–26.
- 43 Abū al-Muẓaffir al-Isfarā'inī, *Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn* (1940), p. 84; Stern, "Missionaries," 221, 225–26.
- 44 Stern, "Missionaries," 221, 227–28.
- 45 *Ta'rīkh-i ismā'īliya*, p. 21.
- 46 Al-Bīrūnī mentions Abū Ya'qūb in his *Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind* (p. 32 Sachau, p. 47 Indian edition) and gives his nickname (*laqab*) but both editions have a blank. Madelung, nevertheless, says that it is *khayshafūj* ("Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis," 131), which must be right. Al-Bīrūnī's text was edited before Stern discovered the correct reading of this otherwise unusual word.
- 47 *Kashf asrār*, f. 4r ("al-khayshafūj al-sijzī"); 7v, 8r, 10v, 18r ("al-khayshafūj"); and 8v (al-sijzī, cited as author of *Kashf al-mahjūb*), 4r (citing *al-Yanābi'*?). In the last case the reading of al-Bustī's wording is conjectural since the manuscript is not at all clear. See Stern, "Al-Bustī," pp. 307–8.
- 48 On this see Stern, "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijzī's nickname," *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch (London, 1970), pp. 415–16.
- 49 See Stern, "Missionaries," 221, 228.
- 50 *Iftikhār* (ed. Ghalib), pp. 82 and 111. See also Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 83, note 3.
- 51 By most reckonings such a list would have counted three "successors" in the period leading to the first Fatimid al-Mahdī and then add the caliphs al-Qā'im, al-Manṣūr, and finally al-Mu'izz, who would therefore be the seventh. Al-Sijistānī says explicitly that the number of *khulafā'* will equal the number of imams in a regular cycle and he also makes it clear that the fourth of these was the first to conquer and rule cities – i.e. the first of the Fatimid caliphs al-Mahdī. *Sullam*, p. 84; *Iftikhār*, (Ghalib), pp. 51, 81, 127. Al-Sijistānī never actually names any of the *khulafā'*.
- 52 Works in the surviving literature, however, bear attributions in some records to al-Sijistānī and yet are also dedicated internally to the reigning imam al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh whose rule commenced only in 386/996. The copies of these works which are currently available indicate that they were composed anonymously even later than the time of al-Ḥākim, although possibly incorporating material taken from the writings of al-Sijistānī. None of these cases is convincing therefore because they are highly likely to be erroneously ascribed to his authorship as they stand and thus they cannot be taken as providing evidence to prove a later date for his death.
- 53 Although he certainly mentions the *khulafā'*, including most particularly the fourth who was, he says, the first to conquer cities (*Sullam*, p. 84). This clearly refers to

- 'Ubaydallāh al-Mahdī, although without naming him. Cf. *Ifṭikhār*, (Ghalib), p. 81, on the rise of the Fatimids.
- 54 *Maqālīd*, p. 75; *Tuḥfa*, p. 144.
- 55 Mentioned, for example, in the *Ifṭikhār*, p. 48 (printed also by Halm, *Kosmologie*, p. 209); *Yanābī'*, p. 19; *Tuḥfa*, pp. 143–44.
- 56 For al-Sijistānī the *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* ("Master of interpretation") is the *waṣī*. The *waṣī* is not an imam. *Yanābī'*, p. 75. (Corbin who edited and partially translated the *Yanābī'* misunderstood this point: see his translation p. 101, para. 147.)
- 57 The short treatise *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn*, ascribed to him and found now in the Syrian Ismaili community, says exactly this.
- 58 The *Nuṣra (Riyāḍ)*, p. 204) states that "there is not another era of imams after the *Qā'im* but rather his *lawāḥiq* and his *khulafā'* who act as his deputies in the world." The *Sullam al-najāt* seems to confirm the same idea and clearly accords some form of *ta'yīd* to the *lawāḥiq*, who are responsible for establishing the *da'wa* on behalf of the *Qā'im* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl (pp. 76–79, 89). The *lawāḥiq* are to "spread the *da'wa*" and "publicize the *ta'wīl*," *lithbāt*, pp. 91–92. Additional references in *Maqālīd*, pp. 75, 197, 242, say much the same thing. All indications point to the *lāhiq* as a regional authority – that is, as a series of officers "installed" (*manṣūb*) or "resident" (*muqīm*) in each of the twelve districts (*jazā'ir*) of the earth. Thus there are, in theory, twelve *lawāḥiq* and the single *khalīfa* at one time.
- 59 For further discussion see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 236–38. It may well be that al-Sijistānī's attention to this concept reflects an older position in which he understood that the *ghayba* of the imam (Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl) meant that the highest visible Ismaili authorities are the *lawāḥiq* whatever the status of the *khulafā'*. He certainly insists throughout his writings that the imam/messiah, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, is in *ghayba*. One Ismaili work which is probably from a contemporary period, the *Kitāb shajara* (on which see below pages 39–40, 56), indicates outright that both the imam and the *lawāḥiq* receive *ta'yīd* as well as comprehend the *ta'wīl*. Lower members of the hierarchy – that is the *dā'īs* and *mustajībīs* (novices) – participate only in *ta'wīl* (ed. Tamer as *Shajarat al-yaqīn* (by 'Abdān), p. 97; an identical passage occurs in Abū Fīrās's *al-Idāh*, ed. Tamer, p. 94). Because the *Shajara* relies heavily on al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl*, this doctrine is likely to be his.
- 60 Nearly all available copies of al-Sijistānī's writings stem from limited resources which yield copies not more than two centuries old. Any tradition would fail in the perfect transmission of such material in the best of circumstances.
- 61 A companion problem is that of censorship and selective editing. Without fourth/tenth century copies (or any from the next several centuries for that matter) nothing is certain on this score. Some of the surviving Indian or Yemeni material, such as the *Mawāzīn fī al-dīn*, falsely (probably) credited to al-Sijistānī in the *Fihrist* – a relatively late attempt by an Ismaili scholar, known by the nickname al-Majdū', to catalog the entire corpus of its literature in his day – shows signs of having been extracted from an early source (perhaps itself a genuine Sijistānī work?) in the time of al-Ḥākim and then re-edited in the reign of al-Musta'īlī (487/1094–495/1101). See Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Majdū', *Fahrasat al-kutub wa al-rasā'il*, ed. A. Monzavi, Tehran, 1966, pp. 189–90. This well illustrates the problem of secondary and tertiary reuse of writings of the older *dā'īs* in later times. It also reveals the many difficulties inherent in trying to disengage the authentic words of al-Sijistānī out of the various contexts in which the later compilers included them.

- 62 One good place to find evidence of this tendency is the set of glosses to al-Sijistānī's *Yanābī'* from the manuscript transcribed by Corbin for his edition of this work (belonging to Professor Abbas Hamdani). There it is amply clear that often neither the student copyist nor the master understood well enough that al-Sijistānī's teaching was not in accord with that of al-Kirmānī. For a particular example, see p. 18 and the notes for line 3 of the same page on the seven heavenly letters.
- 63 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirin* (ed. M. B. al-Rahman, Berlin, 1923), pp. 421–22. For a full discussion of the issue of *tanāsukh* (metempsychosis), see below Part II, chapter 13 and Walker, "Metempsychosis in Islam," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams* (eds. Hallaq and Little, Leiden, Brill, 1991), pp. 215–34, to which must be added Madelung's "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis," *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden, Brill, 1990), pp. 131–43.
- 64 *Al-Riyāḍ*, p. 72 (citing *Iftikhār* and quoting a sentence from the chapter on "Amr," *Iftikhār*, 36, lines 10–11) and 93 (citing the forty-fourth *iqḷid* of the *Maqālīd*).
- 65 In general on the works of al-Sijistānī besides the comments offered here, see Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature*, Malibu, Calif., Undena Publications, 1977, pp. 82–89 and P. Walker, *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and the Development of Ismaili Neoplatonism*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Chicago, 1974, appendix "The Works of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī," pp. 199–217.
- 66 It is quoted several times in a Yemeni work called *Kanz al-walad* by the sixth/twelfth-century author, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamidī (edited by Ghalib, Beirut, 1971), pp. 248–64, but since these quotations are so mixed with other material, it is hard to judge what the *Bishāra* actually contained.
- 67 For details concerning editions and manuscripts of al-Sijistānī's works, see the bibliography.
- 68 *Al-Riyāḍ* cites *al-Iftikhār* on p. 72 (quoting a brief passage: *Iftikhār*, 36, lines 10–11) and *al-Maqālīd* on p. 93; *al-Risāla al-waḍī'a* cites *al-Iftikhār* on f. 50 r.
- 69 *Al-Risāla al-muḍī'a fī al-amr wa al-āmir wa al-ma'mūr*, edited M. Ghalib in *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Kirmānī* (Beirut, 1983), pp. 43–60.
- 70 *Al-Bishāra* is mentioned twice in *al-Iftikhār*, (Ghalib), pp. 82 and 88, and in *al-Maqālīd*, p. 159 (*iqḷid* 45); *Ithbāt al-nubūwa* is cited in *al-Maqālīd*, p. 104 (*iqḷid* no. 27: referring to the fourth chapter, seventh part of the *Ithbāt*) and p. 248 (*iqḷid* no. 63: referring to the fifth part); *al-Yanābī'* is mentioned in *al-Maqālīd*, p. 110 (*iqḷid* no. 29: referring to the 33rd *yanbū'*).
- 71 In his *al-Iftikhār* he cites *iqḷids* eight and nine (Ghalib, p. 30); it is also mentioned again (p. 107); and he cites *al-Bishāra* on pp. 82 and 88.
- 72 *Sullam*, p. 16, citing the ninth *iqḷid*.
- 73 See particularly Madelung, "Metempsychosis," 131–33.
- 74 *Iftikhār*, 51, 72, 127, 82–84; *Maqālīd*, pp. 181–82, 194, 200–01, 242; *Ithbāt*, p. 153; *Yanābī'*, pp. 19, 74; *Sullam*, pp. 78–79; *Tuḥfa*, p. 144. See *Riyāḍ*, p. 204, for *al-Nuṣra*.
- 75 *Maqālīd*, p. 242; *Iftikhār*, p. 127.
- 76 *Riyāḍ*, pp. 195, 210.
- 77 The surviving text of the *Kashf al-mahjūb* presents numerous interesting problems as to authenticity. Now it is found only in a paraphrase written in an awkward, archaic Persian. Quite possibly it is little more than a summary of the Arabic original and therefore may not contain everything from it. Al-Bustī cites it but does not offer enough information about it to make much of a judgment about its contents. Stern

(“Abū’l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his Refutation of Ismā’īlīsm,” *JRAS* (1961): 14–35; reprinted in *Studies*, pp. 299–320) took al-Bustī’s statements about the *Kashf al-mahjūb* as quotations from it which I think is not the case. Al-Bīrūnī in his work on India mentions a work by al-Sijistānī with this title in which the author subscribes to a form of metempsychosis. Significantly, the Persian text appears to deny metempsychosis, although not that form of it which al-Bīrūnī credits to al-Sijistānī.

- 78 A conclusion seems inescapable that the *Nuṣra* and the *Kashf* must be early. Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself also states that al-Sijistānī was forced to change his views on some matters (such as metempsychosis) when so directed by the imam or the central *da’wa*. Surely, if this is correct, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is saying that the works he cites are those of an earlier time and that the al-Sijistānī he refers to is this older less acceptable writer whose books later were quite respectable (but which he, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, does not explicitly credit). It is quite possible that whoever reworked the *Kashf al-mahjūb* into its present Persian form (the best candidate is Nāṣir himself) edited out the offensive material.

- 79 Among those listed by Poonawala (*Biobibliography*, pp. 85–89), the *Sarā’ir al-ma’ād wa al-ma’āsh* (no. 11) was written in the time of the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir and therefore has little to do with al-Sijistānī. The misattribution is a mistake of al-Majdū’ who in any case does not state explicitly that it is by al-Sijistānī. The *Mawāzīn* (or *Mawāzīn fī al-dīn*, no. 4) was compiled in the reign of al-Ḥākim and then re-edited later. It reads more like a work of al-Sijistānī and may in fact be based on a treatise such as *al-Yanābī’*. *Al-Bāhira* (no. 13) and *Musliyat al-aḥzān* (no. 9) both exist and may well be authentic. *Al-Baṣā’ir* (no. 18, possibly cited by al-Bustī) may be the work mentioned in the nineteenth chapter of *Ḍiyā’ al-albāb*. At least two works *Sūs al-baqā’* (no. 14, mentioned by Nāṣir-i Khusraw) and *al-’Ilm al-maknūn* (no. 20, cited by al-Daylamī) are so far missing altogether.

The Syrian small treatise called *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* ascribed to al-Sijistānī is not well known in the Yemeni/Ṭayyibī tradition, although it is mentioned by al-Majdū’ (*Fihrist*, p. 193). In at least one particular this Syrian *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* can not be by al-Sijistānī since it gives the list of seven imams as ‘Alī, Ḥusayn, ‘Alī, Muḥammad, Ja’far and Muḥammad, leaving out Ḥasan the elder son of ‘Alī, following the rule of the Nizari Ismailis. The al-Sijistānī of the other texts includes Ḥasan as one of the imams but always excludes ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib who occupies the higher rank of *asās* (examples: *Maqālīd*, p. 192; *Ifīkhār*, p. 72). It also refers to seven *ḥujjas* who seem to be equivalent to the twelve *lawāḥiq*, something al-Sijistānī never does elsewhere. Most likely therefore, like several other such treatises, the *Tuḥfat al-mustajībīn* is a later work although based in part on doctrines which its author took from al-Sijistānī.

- 80 *Ifīkhār*, p. 20.

- 81 *Ifīkhār*, p. 24.

- 82 *Sullam*, p. 5.

## 2 Religious and philosophical resources

- 1 As one example, in the *Maqālīd*, p. 191, he says that the sixth *nāṭiq* is “Master of this era,” meaning Muḥammad and Islam. The superiority of Islam is recognized consistently. Examples: *Maqālīd*, pp. 230–31; *Ithbāt*, section III, chapter 12.
- 2 On which see A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, and E. Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-’ashariyya,” *BSOAS* 39 (1976): 521–34.

- 3 Although Madelung ("Imamat," 110, n. 367) noted that one group of the *wāqifiya* following Mūsā b. Ja'far did claim that his successors were *khulafā'* rather than imams. This, however, was not a common doctrine in Shiism other than among the early Ismailis.
- 4 On the thought and importance of both Imami figures, see Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid* (Beirut, 1978).
- 5 Quoted by al-Sijistānī, among other places, in his *Iftikhār*, p. 56.
- 6 Al-Sijistānī recognizes this consistently. See *Maqālīd*, p. 195 (and the whole of *iqḥid* no. 52); and *Iftikhār*, pp. 29, 34, 38, 70.
- 7 The formula al-Sijistānī gives is as follows: all speaker-prophets (*nāṭiqs*) are Founders (*asās*) but not all of the Founders are speaker-prophets (*Maqālīd*, p. 191).
- 8 See *Yanābī'*, para. no. 158, which supports the interpretation that the imam inherits only a sixth of the power of the speaking-prophet, the *nāṭiq*.
- 9 Al-Sijistānī does, however, make it clear that the *khulafā'* are of the same lineage as Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. For example *Sullam*, p. 4. In his *Maqālīd*, p. 192, he confirms this by reference to the imamate as being in the line of Ḥusayn "... including when one of them departed from the world and there remained someone of his descendants who occupied his place."
- 10 Note again the study of Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'ashariyya."
- 11 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī*, I, ed. M. al-Akhundi, Tehran, 1965, 286–92, 525–35.
- 12 Al-Sijistānī is quite specific that the *ūlū 'l-'azm* are the five speaker-prophets who established laws, the *sharā'i'*. *Iftikhār*, p. 59, for example. Adam is not included, *Maqālīd*, pp. 254–55; he is, in fact, excluded by the *Qur'ān* itself (20: 115).
- 13 Al-Sijistānī's position is explained in his *Maqālīd* (p. 197) among other works.
- 14 On Islam as the perfection of this process, see *Maqālīd*, pp. 230–31; *Ithbāt*, III, chapter 12. See further the discussions of prophecy, history and salvation in Part II below.
- 15 The most thorough and detailed study of these doctrines is H. Halm's *Kosmologie und heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya* (Wiesbaden, 1978).
- 16 Recognized, for example, in al-Sijistānī's *Yanābī'*, p. 18.
- 17 On Israeli see the study by A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century*, Oxford, 1958, as well as Stern's article on "Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist."
- 18 On him see Joel L. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam: Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī and his circle*, Leiden, Brill, 1986.
- 19 On whom see *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al-Āmirī's Kitāb al-amad 'alā al-abad*. Edition and translation with commentary by Everett K. Rowson. New Haven, Conn., American Oriental Society, 1988.
- 20 The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' have received considerable attention and there is now a substantial literature about them and their epistles. One part of the interest in them centers on their Ismaili connection which, if confirmed, makes a comparison with al-Sijistānī of extra significance. There is also the question of dating the work of this group. If, as argued by A. Hamdani, a leading expert on them, they belong to an early phase of the Ismaili movement, this relationship is even more important than if they are roughly contemporary or even later, as the evidence uncovered by Stern would suggest. One major problem here is the tendency of the Ikhwān to accept opinions from a variety of sources somewhat indiscriminately.

- 21 On the failure of deductive reasoning, see *Ithbāt*, pp. 132–33 and *Ifṭikhār*, p. 45.
- 22 *Ithbāt*, p. 101.
- 23 Even al-Bustī quite correctly observed that al-Sijistānī's doctrines, such as that surrounding the question of creation, closely resemble those " . . . of the ancients among the philosophers" (*al-qudamā' min al-falāsifa*), *Kashf asrār*, f. 7v.
- 24 *Ithbāt*, pp. 158–59.
- 25 *Ifṭikhār*, chapter on "Imāma" (Poonawala).
- 26 Pp. 125–32, 152–59. The doxography in question is the *Pseudo-Ammonius* on which see below.
- 27 *Iqlīd*s no. 8 and 9 (pp. 31–41) of the *Maqālīd*. *Ifṭikhār*, pp. 20, 24, 30, 45–47, 77. The specific reference to the chapters of *al-Maqālīd* is on p. 30. On religious grounds, he notes that, of all doctrines, the philosophers object most to that of resurrection (*qiyāma*), *Ifṭikhār*, p. 74; *Sullam*, pp. 81–82.
- 28 Mentioned in his *Sullam*, pp. 23–24. On this work see P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān II*, pp. 328–29. See also Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p. 215 (citing material from Rhazes' *Shukūk* and the *Muntakhab ṣiwān al-ḥikma*).
- 29 According to al-Kirmānī's quotations from the *Nuṣra* in the *Riyād*, pp. 99 and 147. In the *Maqālīd*, there is a chapter (*iqlīd* no. 45, pp. 159–62) denying those who say that the soul returns to its body following a cycle of 30,000 years. This was specially refuted, he reports, in his *al-Bishāra* (*Maqālīd*, p. 159). The idea of a cycle for the soul of 30,000 years belongs to Empedocles. On this see E. Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 239–39. The concept of a cycle for the world soul, however, is also found, for example, in Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 199, 200. See Dodds' commentary, pp. 301–3.
- 30 *Riyād*, pp. 94–96.
- 31 *Ithbāt*, p. 90.
- 32 *Riyād*, pp. 67 and 77.
- 33 In *Ifṭikhār*, "Imāma" (Poonawala) he is cited for allowing *ra'y* and *qiyās* and coining *ḥiyāl* (legal tricks); *Maqālīd*, p. 265.
- 34 *Ifṭikhār*, "Imāma" (Poonawala).
- 35 He mentions these three in his *Ifṭikhār*, section on "Imāma," as false authorities on *ḥadīth*, 'ilm, and *akhbār*. Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn must be Abū Zakariyā' Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn b. 'Awn al-Baghdādī (d. 233/847).
- 36 *Maqālīd*, p. 265.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid. This must be Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 833) who was connected to Jahm b. Ṣafwān. See Watt, "The Great Community and the Sects," in *Theology and Law in Islam* (ed. von Grunebaum, Wiesbaden, 1971), p. 30.
- 39 An example of this term is *Riyād* (*Nuṣra*), p. 60.
- 40 *Maqālīd*, pp. 106, 233.
- 41 *Maqālīd*, p. 162; *Ithbāt*, pp. 57–58.
- 42 *Ithbāt*, pp. 86–87; *Maqālīd*, p. 103.
- 43 He calls him "*al-faqīh*" and adds "the mercy of God be upon him" (*rahmat allāh 'alayhi*), *Ifṭikhār*, "Imāma" (this portion of the chapter was omitted by Ghalib).
- 44 On al-Balkhī in this context, see E. Rowson's discussion in "The Philosopher as Littérateur: Al-Tawḥīdī and His Predecessors," in *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 6 (1990): 61–69.
- 45 On whom see Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam*.

- 46 Examples of *wāḍiʿ* as "lawgiver" in *Maqālīd*, pp. 182–83, 244–45; *Ithbāt*, pp. 42, 77; and *Iftikhār*, pp. 18, 44. For additional references see Part II, chapter 11 below.
- 47 Among some authorities there is a tendency to label Neoplatonist both al-Fārābī and al-Kirmānī, not to mention Ibn Sīnā. For the most part, however, this vitiates the meaning of the term. The Neoplatonic element in al-Fārābī is small indeed, if it exists at all, and this fact is better appreciated in the recent literature. See, for example, M. Galston, "A Re-examination of al-Fārābī's Neoplatonism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15 (1977): 13–32; Th. Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by J. F. Wippel, Washington, pp. 23–43; and P. Walker, "Platonisms in Islamic Thought," (forthcoming in *Studia Islamica*).
- 48 For additional material on Neoplatonism consult A. H. Armstrong, *Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1940), Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek Philosophy and Early Medieval Thought* (Cambridge, 1967), and Emile Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, English trans. J. Thomas (Chicago, 1958).
- 49 As will become apparent the one notable exception is a portion of the *Longer Theologia*, which he incorporated piecemeal in his own *Maqālīd*, although possibly not from the *Theologia* itself but rather a common source.
- 50 The edition used here is that of A. Badawi, *Aflūṭīn 'inda al-'arab* (Cairo, 1966). The English translation is that of G. Lewis in volume II of Henry and Schwyzer *Plotini opera* (1959) with corrections published in volume III. The most thorough study of the *Theologia* to date is that of F. Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So-called *Theology of Aristotle*," in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts* (London, The Warburg Institute, 1986), pp. 110–240.
- 51 Preliminary edition from the various Judeo-Arabic fragments by Paul Fenton. For a description of this edition, see his "The Arabic and Hebrew Versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*," in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, pp. 241–64. In addition see S. M. Stern, "Ibn Ḥasday's Neoplatonist: A Neoplatonic Treatise and its Influence on Isaac Israeli and the Longer Version of the *Theology of Aristotle*," *Oriens*, 13–14 (1960–61): 58–120.
- 52 Edition and translation R. Taylor, *The Liber de causis (kalām fī maḥd al-khair): A Study of Medieval Neoplatonism*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, and A. Badawi, *Al-Aflūṭīniya al-muḥdatha 'inda al-'arab* (Cairo, 1955), pp. 1–33. For studies in addition see R. Taylor, "The *Kalām fī maḥd al-khair (Liber de causis)* in the Islamic Philosophical Milieu," in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, pp. 37–52.
- 53 Edited with a German translation and detailed study by U. Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios: ein Beitrag zur neoplatonischen überlieferung im Islam* (Stuttgart, 1989).
- 54 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. A revised text with translation, introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds. 2nd edition, Oxford, 1963.
- 55 On the Arabic history of the *Kalām fī maḥd al-khayr* and the various material on Proclus, see G. Endress, *Plato Arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der Institutio Theologica in arabischer übersetzung*, Beirut, 1973; E. Rowson, "An Unpublished Work by al-ʿAmirī and the Date of the Arabic *De causis*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984): 193–99; R. C. Taylor, "The *Kalām fī maḥd al-khair (Liber de causis)* in the Islamic Philosophical Milieu"; and Taylor, *The Liber de causis (kalām fī maḥd al-khair): A Study of Medieval Neoplatonism*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1981.



- 56 A'lam, pp. 133–51.
- 57 Rudolph, *Die Doxographie*, pp. 27–30.
- 58 Explicitly cited in the text edited by A. Tamer, *Kitāb shajarat al-yaqīn* (Beirut, 1982), pp. 55, 58, 90, 93, 116, 120, 147, 154. There is at least one passage (p. 93) of this work which follows *Pseudo-Ammonius* (XI: 6–11) rather closely. Others exist as well. This text of Tamer's is closely related to *al-Īdāh*, said to have been composed by a sixteenth-century Syrian *dā'i* named Abū Firās, also edited by Tamer, but both are based on Abū Tammām's *Shajara*.
- Significant parallel material between these Ismaili works and the *Pseudo-Ammonius* occurs as follows: *P-A* I and *Īdāh* 111–112 (*Shajara* 116); *P-A* V 1–3 and *Īdāh* 90–91 (*Shajara* 93); *P-A* V 7 and *Īdāh* 118.8; *P-A* V 13 and *Īdāh* 104.18; *P-A* XI 6–11 and *Īdāh* 90–91 (*Shajara* 93); *P-A* XIII 24–25 and *Īdāh* 117 (*Shajara* 110); and *P-A* XXIV 19–22 and *Shajara* 122. This list derives from the notes of Everett Rowson as well as my own and is, in any case, only preliminary, pending further research on Abū Tammām's text in its various forms.
- 59 Rudolph does not, it seems to me, accord enough weight to the possibility of an Ismaili author or compiler of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. He for instance arbitrarily reads what might be taken as the verb *waṣafnā* (although the ms. has *l-w-ṣ-f-nā* whatever that may be) in the introductory paragraph of the manuscript as *nasakhnā* and hence promotes the concept of Ammonius (pseudo) as the work's narrator rather than exploring the possibility of an Ismaili connection.
- 60 The date of the *Maḥṣūl* is not precisely known. Of course it must precede Abū Ḥātim's *Iṣlāḥ*, but not also therefore his *A'lam*. The latter seems to fall between the early dating of the death of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī in 313 and 322, the date of Abū Ḥātim's own death. This judgment is based on indications in it that Abū Bakr has passed on by the time of its compilation.
- 61 He recognizes it only once and that in the dubious context of his *Harmonization (al-Jam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakīmayn Aflāṭūn al-ilāhī wa Aristūṭālīs)*, ed. Dietrici). See P. Kraus, "Plotin chez les arabes," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte* 23 (1941): 263–95, and P. Walker, "Platonisms in Islamic Philosophy".
- 62 It is most likely that the short *Theologia* dates from, at the least, the middle of the third/ninth century, long before al-Nasafī and his *Maḥṣūl*.
- 63 *Theologia*, Badawi, 134; Lewis, 291.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 "The Epistle on Divine Science" and "Sayings of the Shaykh al-Yunan," edited by Badawi in *Aflāṭīn 'inda al-'arab*, pp. 165–83 and 184–98 respectively. An English translation of the first by Lewis and the second by Rosenthal are available in volume II of Henry and Schwyzer's *Plotini opera*.
- 66 On this see Endress, *Plato arabus* and Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So-called *Theology of Aristotle*."
- 67 Badawi, "Epistle," 174.
- 68 This is the theme of *yanbū'* no. 2, of *al-Yanābī'*.
- 69 See for example references on pages 134 and 187 of Badawi's edition.
- 70 Badawi, "Sayings," 188.
- 71 P. 196 ("Ṣiwān"). Cf. Badawi, "Epistle," 182. But compare p. 134 where the One is not a thing and has no *huwīya* and p. 56 describing the thing (*shay'*) above intellect.
- 72 As noted by Fenton, "The Arabic and Hebrew Versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*," pp. 255–57.

- 73 See Stern, “Ibn Ḥasdāy’s Neoplatonist.”
- 74 “La Longue recension de la théologie d’Aristote dans ses rapports avec la doctrine ismaélienne,” *Revue des études islamiques* 27 (1954): 7–20.
- 75 No one has yet undertaken the extremely important task of tracing Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Ismaili sources. Nevertheless, as is shown in his *Khwān al-ikhwān*, which incorporates most of al-Sijistānī’s *Yanābī’*, the latter author is a major source of his material.
- 76 The *Maqālīd* has come to light only in a single unpublished manuscript belonging to the Hamdani Library.
- 77 I am currently preparing a detailed analysis of this material.
- 78 *Maqālīd*, p. 20 = Fenton, f. 37r.
- 79 *Maqālīd*, p. 21, is almost but not quite Fenton, f. 90r. The *Longer Theologia* has “*wa-nna al-naḥsa jawharun mutaharrikun ḥarakatan rūḥānīyatan munsabighun bi-asbāghī al-rūḥānīyat mustafīdatun mimman fawqahā mufīdatun li-man dunahā*,” whereas the *Maqālīd* reads “*wa-nna al-naḥsa jawharun mutaharrikun bāqiyun mutasabbighun bi-l-asbāgh al-rūḥānīyati mustafīdatun mimman fawqahā li-man dunahā*.” Given the uncertainty of the Arabic text in both cases, especially that of the *Longer Theologia* in such a passage, it is almost impossible here to judge whether the differences are not both variants of the same original wording rather than deliberate changes.
- 80 “Ibn Ḥasdāy’s Neoplatonist.”
- 81 *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, edited by M. K. Husayn and M. M. Hilmi, Cairo, 1953, pp. 52–53.
- 82 This list occurs in a passage of his *Maqālīd*, p. 265.
- 83 *Iftikhār* (Ghalib), p. 19.
- 84 Al-Sijistānī does mention the *mutakallimūn* in his *Sullam* (p. 79) with a strongly negative attitude. In the *Ithbāt* he calls *kalām* a middle sort of ‘ilm, p. 122.

### 3 Ismaili predecessors

- 1 See chapter 1 of Stern’s posthumous *Studies in Early Ismā‘īlism*, pp. 3–29 and Halm’s *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen ismā‘īliya: eine studie sur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1978.
- 2 Quoted by Stern, “Cosmological Doctrines,” *Studies*, 18.
- 3 Halm, *Kosmologie*, p. 53.
- 4 On the chronology of the works of al-Sijistānī, see Part I, chapter 1.
- 5 As would be implied, for example, in Abū ‘Īsā’s use of the term *mubda’*.
- 6 Much of the evidence for the doctrines of the Ismailis goes back to an obscure period in the third/ninth century. It is likely that this includes some of the philosophical elements in it as well as the others. It is therefore hard to draw conclusions about which came first. On Bālīnūs (Apollonius of Tyana) and his *Sirr al-khalīqa*, see the *EP* article “Bālīnūs” by M. Plessner and the edition of the Arabic text by Ursula Weisser, *Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung*, Aleppo, 1979. On Jābir ibn Ḥayyān see P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam*, 2 volumes, Cairo, *Memoires de l’institut d’Egypte* 44 and 45, 1943 and 1942. It is extremely regrettable that Kraus did not live to finish volume 3 which would have covered the connection of Jābir with Ismaili doctrines.
- 7 *Yanābī’*, pp. 4–5.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 46. He does not, however, name his opponent in making this characterization.

- The material from his *Nuṣra* in the *Riyāḍ* is more explicit. See for example *Riyāḍ*, p. 67.
- 9 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, f. 10r–v; Stern, “Al-Bustī,” 308.
  - 10 See, in particular, Poonawala’s entries for ‘Abdān, Ghiyāth, the Banū Ḥammād, and Ibn Hamdān.
  - 11 *Kashf asrār*, f. 4r and 8v. The reading of this name by Stern in his “Missionaries,” 308–09 is al-Qayrawānī. Halm, however, notes (*Kosmologie*, p. 135, n. 32) that it might also be read “al-Farwānī” which seems preferable.
  - 12 *Kashf asrār*, f. 8v. This quotation as given by Poonawala (p. 46), incorrectly reads the word *masbūq* as *mastūr*. This argument, however, clearly requires *masbūq*. Compare a passage of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*, p. 36 (IV, 4–5).
  - 13 *Kashf asrār*, f. 2r–v, 4r; Stern, “Missionaries,” 309. Stern evidently did not notice that al-Bustī gives two different citations using between them both versions “al-marwazī” and “al-marwarrudhī,” but clearly referring to the same person. Al-Sijistānī himself mentions someone named al-Marwazī (Abū Bashīr). Perhaps this is the same person. See Part I, chapter 2, p. 34.
  - 14 Edited by H. Ritter and R. Walzer, “Studi su al-Kindi II: Uno scritto morale inedito di al-Kindi.” *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Memorie*. Ser. 6, vol. 8 (1938): 5–63.
  - 15 *Kashf asrār*, f. 2r–v.
  - 16 Ibid.
  - 17 *al-Zīna*, examples: pp. 20, 32, 159, 170, 173, 174 (*al-Ḥukamā’*); 46, 48, 51, 98, 108, 109, 110 (*al-Ḥakīm*); 158 (*al-Falāsifa*); 19 (*al-Qudamā’*); 24 (*al-Ḥukamā’ al-awā’il*).
  - 18 *al-Zīna*, p. 158.
  - 19 Ibid., p. 159.
  - 20 *A’lām*, pp. 10–28.
  - 21 Ibid., pp. 131–59.
  - 22 Ibid., 125–27, 131–32.
  - 23 Ibid., 107–08, 126. Note that the view approved by Abū Ḥātim concerns Proclus’ supposed use of a spiritual (*rūḥānī*) and a corporeal (*jismānī*) logic (*manṭiq*) in one of his books. Abū Ḥātim’s source here must be the *Pseudo-Ammonius* (p. 75) which relates the same fact. Democritus also receives the approval of the *Pseudo-Ammonius* (XXVI.1–3). Abū Ḥātim accepts the *Sirr al-khalīqa* but (pp. 275–76) seems to agree with Abū Bakr al-Rāzī who reported that its author was a modern who lived in the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma’mūn and was Muslim. What appeals to Abū Ḥātim is the suggestion in the *Sirr* that it is based on the words of Hermes who was, in fact, the prophet Idris.
  - 24 *A’lām*, pp. 126, 131.
  - 25 See *A’lām*, p. 153, and the opening paragraph of the *Pseudo-Ammonius*.
  - 26 All references here are to the manuscript in the Hamdani Library.
  - 27 *Iṣlāḥ*, Hamdani ms. p. 28, “*wa’l-ān abtadī fī iṣlāḥ mā waqa’a min al-ghalat fī al-kutub al-ladhī qad jāra dhikruhu*”. Clearly “*al-kutub*” should be “*al-kitāb*” as in Tübingen ms.
  - 28 In the Hamdani manuscript the formal “rectification” (*iṣlāḥ*) begins on page 18 and runs to the end of page 338. The philosophical issues, however, occupy only the first 35 pages of this section or less than a tenth of the whole. Stern studied a portion of the later material in this work for his “Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī on Persian Religion,” in *Studies*, 30–46.

- 29 Examples in the Hamdani ms. on pages 19 (*al-Qudamā*), 22, 26, 33, 35, 44 (*al-Ḥukamā'*), and 24 (*al-Ḥukamā' al-awā'il*). The phrase *al-Ḥukamā' al-awā'il* clearly appears where he emphasizes a distinction between them and the “Sages of the Law” (*Hukamā' al-sharī'a*). The former are the Greek philosophers and the latter are the scholars within the tradition of revealed scriptures. Abū Ḥātim specifies the need to comprehend properly exactly what the “numerous symbols” (*rumūz kathīra*), employed in these issues by the sages (*ḥukamā'*), mean.
- 30 This point is soundly corroborated by al-Bustī.
- 31 *Iṣlāḥ*, p. 20.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 32–34.
- 35 On this see P. Walker, “Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Ismaili Thought,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9 (1978): 360–61.
- 36 *Iṣlāḥ*, pp. 19–20.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27, 39–40.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 53 *Riyāḍ*, p. 67.
- 54 The *Elements of Theology*, pp. 184–85. The key passage from the *Enneads* as they appear in Arabic translation says, “We say that the soul does not descend in her entirety to this lower world of sense, neither the universal soul nor our souls, but part of her remains in the world of the mind” (trans. by G. Lewis in *Plotini Opera* II, ed. Henry and Schwyzer, Paris and Brussels, 1959). The text is *Theologia* VII, 41 (Badawy edition, p. 90) = *Ennead* IV, 8, 8. See also the commentary of Dodds (pp. 309–10) and his remarks in the introduction to the *Elements* (p. xx).
- 55 Al-Sijistānī clearly refers to books whose authors failed to anticipate the critical attack of their opponents. Al-Nasafī's *al-Maḥṣūl* appears to fit this description and this may be why al-Sijistānī wrote a *nuṣra* for it. His purpose was to rescue and fortify the position of al-Nasafī against its detractors.
- 56 *Kashf asrār*, f. 2r, 3v, 4r–v, 5r, 7v, 8r, 10r–v, 13v, 23r, 24r. According to Stern folio 13 is out of place and it should be remembered, in any case, that the Ambrosiana manuscript is only an excerpt of al-Bustī's original text.
- 57 As stated previously A. Tamer edited and published a portion of the Arabic text under the title *Kitāb shajarat al-yaqīn* (Beirut, 1982) but claims that its author is the

famous third/ninth-century *dā'ī* of Iraq, 'Abdān. In 'Alī b. al-Walīd's *Ḍiyā' al-albāb* (ms. Hamdani Library), a late sixth/twelfth-century Yemeni Ismaili compilation which quotes a number of passages from it, the author is clearly said to be Abū Tammām. Tamer is certainly wrong about 'Abdān because al-Nasafī appears in it frequently. Poonawala conjectured that Abū Tammām might be a sixth/twelfth-century author because that is the century of its earliest citation in the *da'wa*. However, given the content and teachings in the *Shajara* an early to mid fourth/tenth century date is more likely. Abū Tammām cites the *Maḥṣūl* on pp. 55, 58, 90, 93, 116, 120, 147, 154, according to the text edited by Tamer. Professor Abbas Hamdani has now discovered a copy of part one (*juz' awwal*) of Abū Tammām's original work. The manuscript he located is from the Hamdani Library but not one he owns personally. An analysis of it reveals that Tamer's text of the *Shajara* which also appears (often more accurately) in Abū Firās's *al-Idāh* is more or less part two of the same work. Tamer's text (*al-Idāh*, 76), for example, makes an unmistakable reference to material in part one.

- 58 On this author who died in 612/1215 see Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, p. 158.
- 59 Edited A. Tamer, Beirut, 1965.
- 60 An additional passage from the *Maḥṣūl* may exist in Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥārithī (d. 584/1188) *Majmū' al-tarbīya* vol. II (ms. Hamdani Library). See Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, pp. 144–48. This material, however, also appears in the very first section of part one of Abū Tammām's *Shajara*.
- 61 Ms. Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.
- 62 *Kashf asrār*, 4r–v.
- 63 *Kashf asrār*, 23r.
- 64 *Kashf asrār*, 4v.
- 65 Because they contain clear and direct quotations, Abū Ḥātim's *Iṣlāh* and al-Kirmānī's *Riyāḍ* supply most of the material that follows.
- 66 *Riyāḍ*, pp. 214–15. The wording here parallels *Pseudo-Ammonius* V: 7 and *Shajara*, pp. 122–23 (*Idāh*, p. 118).
- 67 *Riyāḍ*, p. 217; *Pseudo-Ammonius* V: 1–3; *Shajara* (Tamer) pp. 116, 120.
- 68 *Riyāḍ*, p. 217; *Pseudo-Ammonius* V: 15.
- 69 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, 2r, 8r.
- 70 *Kashf asrār*, 3v.
- 71 *Riyāḍ*, p. 228; *Pseudo-Ammonius*, pp. 73–74.
- 72 *Riyāḍ*, p. 228.
- 73 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, 2r.
- 74 Al-Kirmānī's treatise, *Risālat al-muḍī' a fī al-amr wa al-āmīr wa al-ma'mūr*, was written specifically in response to the twenty-eighth *iqḷīd* of al-Sijistānī's *Maqālīd*, which it quotes at length. It is now available in M. Ghalib's edition of *Majmū'at rasā'il al-Kirmānī* (Beirut, 1983), pp. 43–60.
- 75 *Riyāḍ*, p. 221 (on line 17 add *li-azaliyat 'illatihi* from the Hamdani ms).
- 76 *Ibid.*, pp. 220, 224.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- 78 *Ibid.*, pp. 224–25, reading *min al-mubdi' al-tāmm lā takūn illā tammām fa-l-mubda' idhā bi-l-ibdā'*. This formula is quoted in the *Idāh* (p. 117) and *Iṣlāh* (pp. 32–34). The *Shajara* (Tamer, p. 121) does not have what is obviously the correct reading.
- 79 *Riyāḍ*, p. 226.
- 80 *Iṣlāh*, p. 19; cf. *Idāh*, p. 149.

- 81 *Kashf asrār*, 3v.
- 82 Ibid., 4r.
- 83 Ibid., 4v.
- 84 Ibid., 2v–4r.
- 85 The meaning of this term here and in the writings of al-Sijistānī is not that of the later philosophical writers nor the standard dictionaries.
- 86 *Iṣlāḥ*, pp. 35–36.
- 87 Ibid., p. 27; compare *Īdāḥ*, pp. 52–55.
- 88 *Iṣlāḥ*, p. 29.
- 89 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, 13v (as in ms.).
- 90 *Iṣlāḥ*, p. 29.
- 91 *Kashf asrār*, 5r.
- 92 An extremely important doctrinal point was al-Nasafī's insistence that there are in all seven *ūlū'l-'azm* (not five as implied in the *Qur'ān* and as held by, among others, al-Sijistānī). Al-Nasafī maintained that Adam had no law, that he taught monotheism but without imposing works (which would require a law). Nevertheless he said that Adam was one of the *ūlū'l-'azm*, as is the seventh *Nāṭiq*, the Messiah, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il. On this see *Iṣlāḥ*, pp. 52–53; *Riyāḍ*, pp. 176–212; Madelung, "Das Imamāt," 102–03.
- 93 *Iṣlāḥ*, p. 28; *Riyāḍ*, p. 119.
- 94 Al-Bustī, *Kashf asrār*, 23r.
- 95 The *Kitāb al-khawāṣṣ*, as stated by al-Bustī (*Kashf asrār*, 23r) and confirmed apparently by references in the *Shajara* (Tamer, pp. 57–58). Cf. *Īdāḥ*, pp. 54, 55. On this book of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, see H. Corbin, *Qaṣida*, pp. 66–68, n. 111, and P. Kraus, *Jābir*, II, 63, n. 5.
- 96 This is the conclusion of Madelung, "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis."
- 97 *Rāḥat al-'aql*, p. 22.
- 98 Ibid., p. 23.
- 99 *Riyāḍ*, pp. 72, 93, 210.
- 100 Ibid., pp. 87–88, with some corrections based on the Hamdani ms.
- 101 *Riyāḍ*, pp. 111–12.

#### 4 Introduction: categories and terms

- 1 Such as the famous seventh/thirteenth-century writer, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who was both. There is a controversy over whether al-Ṭūsī was actually an Ismaili or not, but that does not alter the point. He certainly did, during a portion of his career, write treatises which express an Ismaili point of view and he was heavily influenced by philosophy and that is what counts.
- 2 Al-Kirmānī is equally interesting but because he belonged to a philosophical school quite distinct from that of al-Sijistānī, since he adhered by and large to al-Fārābī's Aristotelian positions, an investigation of his writings leads to a different set of conclusions. It would form the basis of a separate volume.
- 3 Perhaps the most detailed exposition of this principle is the first section of al-Sijistānī's *Ithbāt al-nubūwa*, but it reappears again and again in various chapters of his books. A prominent feature of this form of analysis is "the balancing of letters" (*mīzān al-ḥurūf*) which requires certain key words in sacred names or expressions to match or indicate significant parallel features of spiritual reality. Henry Corbin

discussed this tendency which he called the “theologoumenon des membres” or “isomorphismes,” among other places, in his introduction to the French translation of *Yanābīʿ*, p. 11.

4 *Yanābīʿ*, p. 5.

5 An example of the same principle of organization as those followed here is evident in A. Altmann’s essay “The Philosophy of Isaac Israeli” in Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 147–217.

## 5 Theology of unqualified transcendence

1 The Arabic term *tawḥīd* derives from the second form of the verb and therefore carries a declarative or estimative meaning, here emphasizing the idea of “declaring God to be one” or “professing God’s oneness.” This term thus is active and not passive; as a theological concept it demands a statement from the believer that demonstrates how *tawḥīd* is to be achieved, and not merely a passive recognition of that fact.

The theological position of al-Sijistānī which is the basis of the discussion in this chapter was first outlined by me in an article entitled, “An Ismāʿīlī Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable, Neoplatonic God,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies* (Leiden, Brill), 2 (1974): 7–21.

2 *Ithbāt*, p. 177.

3 These words belong to the famous passage of the *Theologia* (I, 24–25) describing the soul’s ascent through intellect to a vision of the One. Cf. *Enneads* IV, 8, 1, which does not really carry the same mystical intensity as the Arabic source in this instance.

4 *Ifṭikhār*, chapter on “Tawḥīd,” (Ghalib) p. 24.

5 *Ibid.* (Ghalib) pp. 28–29.

6 *Maqālīd*, p. 41.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

8 See E. R. Dodds, “Appendix I: The Unknown God in Neoplatonism,” in his edition of Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, pp. 310–13.

9 Al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafīya*, ed. Abu Rida, vol. 1, pp. 97–162; English trans. A. Ivry, *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*. See in particular al-Kindī’s concluding statement, pp. 160–61 (2nd edition, Cairo, 1978, 104–05); Ivry, pp. 112–13.

10 *Maqālīd*, p. 43.

11 *Fīʾl-ʾilm al-ilāhī (The Epistle on Divine Science)*, ed. Badawi in *Aflāṭūn ʾinda al-ʿArab*, p. 183; English trans. Lewis, *Plotini opera*, II, 357.

12 The whole of *lqīd* no. 4 of *Maqālīd* (pp. 17–19) “Fī qudrat al-mubdī” is devoted to just this problem. Cf. *Epistle on Divine Science*, Badawi, 177.

13 *lqīd* no. 5 of *Maqālīd* (pp. 19–23), “Fīʾl-innīya.” Cf. *Maqālīd*, p. 257 where he uses the formula “al-wāḥid al-ladhī lā innīya fīhī” (“The One in which there is no *innīya*”). Note as well *Maqālīd*, p. 235, where he says that the *amr* (command) has neither *aysīya* or *innīya*. Cf. *Ifṭikhār*, pp. 1, 17.

14 *lqīd* no. 7 “fīʾl-fardānīya,” *Maqālīd* (pp. 28–31); and *lqīd* no. 12: “fīʾl-farq bayna wāḥid al-ʿadad waʾl-wāḥid al-ladhī laysa min al-ʿadad,” *Maqālīd* (pp. 51–54). *Ifṭikhār*, p. 26. Cf. *Epistle*, trs. Lewis, p. 345.

15 *lqīd* no. 8: “fī anna allāha . . . laysa bi-ʾilla,” *Maqālīd* (pp. 31–36). In the Arabic *Theologia*, God is consistently called a cause of things or the cause of causes. Obviously al-Sijistānī did not accept these statements. In common Neoplatonic

- doctrine the cause is superior ontologically to its effect (see for example Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. seven) and therefore is preserved from responsibility for it.
- 16 *Iqlīd* no. 9, “fī anna allāh laysa bi-jawhar,” *Maqālīd* (pp. 36–41). Al-Sijistānī refers back to this discussion and this work in his *Sullam al-najāt*, p. 16 and in the *Iftikhār*, p. 30.
  - 17 See the following note and al-Sijistānī’s *Sullam*, pp. 12–15.
  - 18 *Yanābī’*, pp. 15–17 (the 2nd *yanbū’*). In his *Maqālīd* (p. 73) he denies further that there is a *huwīya* for the Command (*amr*).
  - 19 On this see *iqlīd* no. 11, “fī anna qawl al-qā’il inna allāh shay’ lā ka-l-ashyā’ bāṭil muḥāl” *Maqālīd* (pp. 48–51). Those who upheld such a formula include al-Māturidī (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. F. Kholeif, pp. 104–05) and Ibn Bābuya (*Risālat al-i’tiqādāt* [A *Shi’ite Creed*], p. 26). It also appears to be the doctrine of the Arabic Plotinus (al-Shaykh al-Yunan) *Sayings*, Badawi, p. 185; Rosenthal (in *Plotini opera*, II) p. 412.
  - 20 *Iftikhār*, p. 30. The two chapters of *Maqālīd* (*iqlīds* eight and nine) have already been cited. Also *Sullam*, p. 16 on the subject of substance (*jawhar*).
  - 21 *Sullam*, p. 16.
  - 22 *Theologia*, Badawi, p. 87 (cause of causes); *Epistle on Divine Science*, Badawi, p. 174 (Lewis, 321); p. 175 (substance).
  - 23 *Maqālīd*, p. 47.
  - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 74; *Yanābī’*, p. 13; *Kashf* I: 7.
  - 25 *Iftikhār*, p. 27.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
  - 27 *Maqālīd*, p. 46.
  - 28 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
  - 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–64.
  - 30 Al-Bustī was fully informed about this theme in the writings of the Ismailis. He comments that one cannot both confirm and deny the same thing at the same time as is implied in al-Sijistānī’s doctrine.
  - 31 *Maqālīd*, p. 60.
  - 32 Fenton, 30v–31r.
  - 33 See, for example, the sixth part of the first “excellence” of the human being (“the cognizance of the Originator” *ma’rifat al-mubdī’*), *Ithbāt*, p. 30.

## 6 Creation as command

- 1 This was also the subject of an earlier article by the author entitled “The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation,” *Studia Islamica* 40 (1974): 75–85.
- 2 The term *badī’*, a *maṣḍar* of the IV form *abda’a*, is itself Quranic as in verses 2:117 and 6:101, although not the verbal forms derived from it. Therefore the root of this complex that al-Sijistānī and others use to indicate this principle is not self evident in the Islamic theological tradition, especially when it becomes a part of a technical lexicon somewhat divorced from scriptural references. Nevertheless, it is certain that the context in which God is called *Badī’* in the *Qur’ān* relates specifically to creation. Verse 2:117 is particularly relevant and might be translated as follows: “The Originator (*badī’*) of the heavens and the earth, when He executes a command (*amr*), He says to it ‘be’ and it is.”
- 3 There is a useful discussion of this term by S. M. Stern in *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 66–74,



- which includes important material from al-Kindī, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and the *Pseudo-Ammonius*. See also R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 187–90.
- 4 See the discussion of Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 195–97 for these and other citations.
  - 5 See chapter 3 of Part I.
  - 6 From al-Kindī's treatise *The Agent in the proper sense, being first and perfect, and the agent in the metaphorical sense, being imperfect* translated and quoted by Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, p. 68. Stern presents there (pp. 68–74) a good deal of the known material on the term *ibdā'* in the earlier philosophical literature in Arabic.
  - 7 Badawi, 19; Taylor, prop. 17.
  - 8 Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate*, pp. 84–85.
  - 9 See *Maqālīd*, pp. 80, 145, and *Ifīkhār*, p. 31, for examples of al-Sijistānī's use of "ta'yīs."
  - 10 *Ithbāt*, p. 28; *Maqālīd*, p. 85; *Yanābī'*, p. 26. *Iqlīd* no. 22 of the *Maqālīd* (pp. 84–89) in particular argues that "Al-ibdā' does not take place by augmentation in a temporal mode."
  - 11 *Yanābī'*, pp. 37–38 (*yanbū'* no. 13); cf. *Ithbāt*, p. 28.
  - 12 *Yanābī'*, p. 26 (*yanbū'* no. 7).
  - 13 *Sullam*, pp. 2–3; *Kashf*, pp. 12, 50.
  - 14 That the world is eternal is admitted in the *Maqālīd*, p. 59 and *Ifīkhār*, p. 75. Note that this doctrine corresponds to the statement of al-Nasafī given above (Part I, chapter 3, p. 58).
  - 15 *Maqālīd*, pp. 104–6.
  - 16 *Ithbāt*, p. 125, as an example.
  - 17 *Ithbāt*, p. 46.
  - 18 *Ifīkhār*, p. 34.
  - 19 On mediation see, as an example, *Maqālīd*, pp. 91, 131. Cf. *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 174–75.
  - 20 That the motion of soul is infinite is explicitly recognized in *iqlīd* no. 49 (pp. 174–78).
  - 21 In his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. See the famous Third Discussion in the account of Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (English translation by Van den Bergh, I, pp. 87–104).
  - 22 Al-Sijistānī also explicitly rejects any notion that God acts in any way like warmth from fire or light from the sun, *Maqālīd*, p. 77.
  - 23 On the doctrine of *amr* in general, see S. Pines, "Amr," *EP*.
  - 24 *Yanābī'*, p. 24.
  - 25 *Yanābī'*, pp. 38–39. Al-Sijistānī evidently knows the Aristotelian principle that there cannot be an intermediary between being and non-being. He would not say that the Word or Command is such a middle principle. Therefore it must be non-being. There is no other possibility.
  - 26 *Iqlīd* no. 19.
  - 27 That God is not a cause is the subject of *Iqlīd* no. 8.
  - 28 On the relationship of cause and effect, in al-Sijistānī's view, see *iqlīds* no. 23 and 24 (*Maqālīd*, pp. 89–96). Much of the material in this section of the *Maqālīd* closely parallels a portion of the *Longer Theologia* (Fenton, 92–96a).
  - 29 *Pseudo-Ammonius*, pp. 72–74 (item no. XXIV).
  - 30 On the question of mediacy and the problem of the "cause" of intellect, refer also to the previous chapter.
  - 31 For al-Sijistānī, see, for example, *Maqālīd*, p. 96, and *iqlīd* no. 23; *Ithbāt* p. 3;

- Yanābī'*, pp. 24, 90–94. See also the comments of Altmann, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 154–57 (the quotation given in this book from the *Longer Theologia* on p. 156 about motion and rest appears, more or less, in the *Maqālīd* on p. 96. The doctrine of logos in Plotinus may be relevant. As Armstrong (*Architecture*, p. 103) comments “The logos, as the cause of this [moral] order, is the representative of *nous*.” But although the *Theologia* speaks in many places about “active words,” it does not convey a similar doctrine.
- 32 Fenton, f. 91Av.
- 33 *Iftikhār*, p. 34.
- 34 *Maqālīd*, p. 76.
- 35 *Maqālīd*, p. 34; *Sullam*, pp. 19–21.
- 36 *Sullam*, p. 20.
- 37 *Yanābī'*, pp. 39–40; *Kashf*, p. 68.
- 38 *Al-Risāla al-mawsūma bi'l-muḍī'a fī al-amr wa al-āmīr wa al-ma'mūr*, ed. Ghalib, *Majmū'a*, pp. 43–60.
- 39 Al-Sijistānī, however, indicates that the doctrine of the *amr* and *irāda* did not meet the approval of certain “ignorant philosophical pretenders.” See his defense of the proposition “That between the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) and His creation (*khalqihī*) there is an intermediary (*wāsiṭa*)” which is the title of *iqḷīd* no. 19 (pp. 76–79), p. 77.
- 40 For the doctrine of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, note particularly the evidence reported on this subject by Pines in his article, “La Longue recension.”

## 7 Intellect, the sum of existent being

- 1 More exactly it is a question of access since knowledge once brought into the individual knowing subject threatens to lose its intelligible qualities by conversion into signs and symbols, forms and language.
- 2 This is the subject of *yanbū'* no. 6 of *al-Yanābī'*, p. 25.
- 3 *Yanbū'* no. 7 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 26–27).
- 4 *Yanbū'* no. 8 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 27–28).
- 5 *Yanbū'* no. 6 (*Yanābī'*, p. 25).
- 6 *Yanbū'* no. 9 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 28–29).
- 7 *Yanbū'* no. 10 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 30–32).
- 8 *Yanbū'* no. 11 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 32–36).
- 9 *Yanbū'* no. 16 (*Yanābī'*, pp. 41–43).
- 10 *Ithbāt*, p. 2.
- 11 *Sullam*, pp. 15–16.
- 12 *Ithbāt*, p. 46.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 47; *Kashf*, p. 15.
- 14 On the concept of intellect as the center of a circle and as the first of number, see P. Kraus, *Jābir*, II, 149 and Fenton, “Theology,” 253 (particularly his note 67).
- 15 *Yanābī'*, pp. 39–40; *Kashf*, p. 68.
- 16 See in particular *Yanābī'*, pp. 15–16 (*yanbū'* no. 2).
- 17 “*Mabzūr*,” *Yanābī'*, p. 57.
- 18 There seems to be no evidence that al-Sijistānī recognized even for rejection the theory either of multiple intellects or of the active intellect (*'aql fa'āl*). At least one passage in the *Longer Theologia* mentions a “second intellect” (Fenton, 91v) and another the “active intellect” (Fenton, 87). I have found no trace of either concept in al-Sijistānī.

- 19 The alternate reading here is *ghayba* – a word that is difficult to define in this context, to say the least.
- 20 Although such terms as *ḥayāt* and *surūr* appear in the *Theologia* separately as attributes of intellect.
- 21 One passage says that intellect is characterized by the terms perfection (*kamāl*), generosity (*jūd*), completeness (*tamām*) and power (*‘izz*), *Maqālīd*, p. 167.
- 22 On this problem consult Corbin’s lengthy discussion in his notes to the French translation (*Trilogie*, pp. 62–63).
- 23 *lfiḥkār*, pp. 39–42.
- 24 *Kashf*, p. 97.
- 25 The ‘*ālam al-waḥd*’ equals the ‘*ālam al-dīn*, *lthbāt*, p. 77; *Maqālīd*, p. 103.
- 26 The clearest discussion of these four stages of intellect is found in *lthbāt*, pp. 49–53.
- 27 *Yanābī’*, pp. 36, 95. In general see below chapter 11 on prophecy.
- 28 *Yanābī’*, p. 21.

## 8 Descending and ascending soul

- 1 Al-Sijistānī’s most important writings about soul are *yanbū’*’s nos. 17–20 (pp. 44–51) of the *Yanābī’* and *iqḷīds* nos. 33–45 (pp. 119–62) of the *Maqālīd*, but there is also a goodly amount of material elsewhere.
- 2 Interestingly the *Longer Theologia* contributes to the problem concerning the number of intellects rather than clarifying it. It states that “the second intellect . . . is the soul” (Fenton, 91v).
- 3 *The Life of Ibn Sina*, ed. and trans. W. E. Gohlman, pp. 18–19. Ibn Sīnā’s emphasis seems explicitly to single out the “Ismaili” doctrine of intellect and of soul as something he could not accept.
- 4 See chapter 3 of the *lfiḥkār* “On Cognizance of the Two Roots (*aṣḷān*),” pp. 41–42.
- 5 *Yanābī’*, pp. 61–63 (*yanbū’* no. 25).
- 6 Referring to soul as “she” is fairly common. In Arabic the soul (*nafs*) is feminine while intellect (*‘aql*) is masculine. The male–female relationship implied is explicitly recognized by al-Sijistānī and therefore it seems legitimate to maintain the gender difference in English, especially where it helps promote clarity. It certainly corresponds to al-Sijistānī’s own view.
- 7 *Maqālīd*, p. 81.
- 8 *Maqālīd*, p. 21.
- 9 Fenton, f. 90r. Both versions are given above in Part I, chapter 2, p. 43.
- 10 See *iqḷīd* no. 49, entitled “That the Motions of Soul are Infinite” (*Fī anna ḥarakāt al-nafs ghayru mutanāhiya*), *Maqālīd*, pp. 174–78.
- 11 *Yanābī’*, pp. 33–34. The two terms in Arabic are *shawq* (longing) and *‘ajz* (incapacity).
- 12 Were she to comprehend the whole of intellect, al-Sijistānī maintains, she would become intellect pure and simple (*Yanābī’*, p. 34).
- 13 Al-Sijistānī’s term for this endlessness is *daymūmiya*. In *iqḷīd* no. 35 of the *Maqālīd* (pp. 124–27) he explains the difference between eternity (*azaliya*) and this concept by noting that true eternity is timeless. It is a characteristic of an intellectual emanation whereas soul’s activity, her longing, for example, exists within a never ending time.
- 14 *Maqālīd*, p. 32.

- 15 *Maqālīd*, p. 106; *Ithbāt*, pp. 18, 145.
- 16 *Maqālīd*, p. 125.
- 17 *Riyād*, p. 67.
- 18 For the doctrine of mediacy in regard to soul, see *Maqālīd*, p. 99 which also appears in the *Longer Theologia* (Fenton, f. 91v).
- 19 *Maqālīd*, p. 175.
- 20 *Ithbāt*, p. 44.
- 21 *Maqālīd*, pp. 94–95 (= *Longer Theologia*, Fenton, f. 95r).
- 22 *Riyād*, pp. 87–88.
- 23 *Ithbāt*, p. 177. See also *Yanābīʿ*, p. 33.
- 24 *Ithbāt*, p. 177.
- 25 The title of this *iqḷīd* is “On the Fallacy of the Claim of Those Who Hold that the Action of God Occurs Subsequent to the Action of the Soul and that God Performs His Action by Virtue of Soul’s Action,” (*Fī ibṣāl qawl man qāla inna fīʿla allāh yataʿakhhharu ʿan fīʿli ʿl-nafs wa min ajli fīʿli ʿl-nafs faʿala allāhu fīʿlahu*), *Maqālīd*, pp. 111–14. But if soul does only what God commands, her defectiveness and her inclination to evil are a form of disobedience that has no cause.
- 26 On this and the problem of metempsychosis, see my article “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams* (eds. Hallaq and Little, Leiden, Brill, 1991), pp. 215–34.
- 27 For complete citations for these references and an analysis of them, see Madelung’s article, “Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis,” *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater (Textes et Memoires Volume XVI)* (Leiden, Brill, 1990), pp. 131–43.
- 28 *Riyād*, pp. 87–94.
- 29 *Riyād*, p. 93. See also chapter 13 below.
- 30 *Yanbuʿ*’s nos. 17 and 18.
- 31 On this see the discussion in Part 1, chapter 3 about the controversy between Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and al-Nasafī.
- 32 For *sulūk*, *Kashf*, 87–88; *Yanābīʿ*, p. 21. For *safar*, *Iftikhār*, p. 60.
- 33 *Yanābīʿ*, p. 36.
- 34 On this see E. R. Dodds’ “Appendix II: The Astral Body in Neoplatonism,” pp. 313–21 of his ed. and trans. of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*.
- 35 *Maqālīd*, p. 102; *Ithbāt*, p. 137.
- 36 *Yanābīʿ*, pp. 67, 83–84, 89.
- 37 *Yanābīʿ*, pp. 2, 83–84.
- 38 *Maqālīd*, p. 197.
- 39 *Ithbāt*, p. 19; *Maqālīd*, p. 21, 81.
- 40 This possibility is explicitly rejected in the 35th *iqḷīd* of the *Maqālīd*.

## 9 Nature and the physical realm

- 1 On this see the comments by Abū Yaʿqūb’s contemporary Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī recorded by al-Tawḥīdī in his *Muqābasāt* which were translated and analyzed by Kraemer in his *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 173–77. See also pp. 278–79. The idea that nature is an ambiguous term was common. Note the definition given it by Israeli (Stern and Altmann, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 50–53).
- 2 *Maqālīd*, p. 128.

- 3 *Yanābī'*, p. 52. Note that on p. 12 he gives only one of these possibilities; the productive power (*al-qūwa al-fā'ila*).
- 4 On the latter definition see particularly Kraemer's notes to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī's treatise "The Spiritual Bodies Possess Rational Souls" in *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 278–79, and the article by R. Arnaldez, "ḥaraka wa-sukūn," *EP*.
- 5 For example *Ithbāt*, p. 44.
- 6 The "world of nature" (*'ālam al-ṭabī'a*) comes up in a discussion of the three worlds, *Maqālīd*, p. 102. He briefly returns to the subject later, p. 254. Al-Sijistānī's list of terms for the ten categories of Aristotle does not precisely match any other Arabic example known to me, although each of his individual terms does occur in the writings of others. See J. N. Mattock, "al-Maḥūlāt," *EP*, which contains a comparative table compiled by F. Zimmermann.
- 7 *Ithbāt*, p. 36.
- 8 *Maqālīd*, p. 121.
- 9 *Maqālīd*, pp. 128, 130; *Yanābī'*, pp. 31–32.
- 10 *Maqālīd*, p. 129; *Yanābī'*, p. 32.
- 11 On the creation of the "Mothers," see *Ithbāt*, p. 145.
- 12 On the problem of the relative order of spheres, natures and elements, see the discussion of Part I, chapter 3. In his *Maqālīd*, al-Sijistānī cites the Physicists (pp. 128–30) to support the view "that the natures (*'anāsir*) are simpler (*ashaddu basāṭatan*) than the Mothers." In general it would appear that al-Sijistānī himself is reporting opinions about nature in this case rather than voicing a view of his own.
- 13 *Maqālīd*, pp. 128–30.
- 14 This theme appears a number of times in this work but is the particular subject of *iqḥid* no. 37 (pp. 127–31), "On Proving that the Compounded World is from the Simple (*al-basīṭ*) World."
- 15 In one example he says, "A proper explanation of why physical substance requires six directions and three dimensions is quite difficult; perhaps we will take up this problem in one of our books," *Maqālīd*, pp. 135–36. See also *Yanābī'*, p. 53.
- 16 *Maqālīd*, pp. 149–50.
- 17 *Ithbāt*, p. 145; *Maqālīd*, p. 253.
- 18 *Ithbāt*, p. 129.
- 19 *Ithbāt*, p. 73.
- 20 *Yanābī'*, pp. 35, 87, 94. Compare *Ithbāt*, pp. 145–47.
- 21 On the doctrine of "disparity" (*tafāwut*) and its importance for al-Sijistānī, see the first section of his *Ithbāt* and the comments on this subject in the following chapter of this study.
- 22 This is the subject of *yanbū'* no. 20.
- 23 *Maqālīd*, pp. 122–23.
- 24 *Yanābī'*, pp. 32–33.
- 25 *Maqālīd*, p. 119.
- 26 *Yanbū'* no. 22.
- 27 The motion of soul and of the heavens is eternal, *Ithbāt*, p. 21.
- 28 See in addition to *yanbū'* no. 22 on the origin of "man," *yanbū'* no. 14 (pp. 38–40) entitled "That the Totality of all Beings is Finite with an Ultimate Limit."
- 29 *Yanābī'*, p. 53.

- 30 This is the subject of *iqḷīd* no. 39, “That is it Inconceivable that there be any Increase at all in the World.”
- 31 *Maqālīd*, p. 247.

## 10 A cosmic anthropology

- 1 On the beginning of rationality (articulated speech, *nuṭq*) as the beginning of spirituality (*rūḥānīya*), see *Ithbāt*, p. 44.
- 2 The theme of mankind as the microcosm, while fully standard in medieval Islamic literature, is nevertheless of great importance in al-Sijistānī’s understanding of the cosmic system. One example of the way he treats this theme is *iqḷīd* no. 56 (*Maqālīd*, pp. 213–16), entitled “That Creation is so Absorbed in Mankind that Nothing at all in it Eludes Him.” Another reference to the “small world” (*al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr*), p. 197.
- 3 *Ithbāt*, p. 63.
- 4 Examples of this concept: *Yanābī’*, pp. 2, 67, 83–84, 89.
- 5 *Ithbāt*, pp. 27, 29, 42, 108; *Maqālīd*, p. 226.
- 6 For the term itself al-Sijistānī claims Quranic support, *Ithbāt*, pp. 26–27, citing *Qur’ān*, 67: 3, “He who created the seven heavens one above the other; no want of proportion (‘disparity,’ *tafāwut*) wilt thou see in the creation.” (Yusuf Ali).
- 7 *Ifṭikhār*, p. 78.
- 8 *Ithbāt*, p. 41.
- 9 *Ithbāt*, pp. 24–27; *Maqālīd*, pp. 222–27.
- 10 *Ithbāt*, pp. 27, 29.
- 11 On the doctrine of hierarchies, see also P. Walker, “Cosmic Hierarchies in Early Ismā’īlī Thought,” *The Muslim World*, 66 (1976): 14–28.
- 12 *Maqālīd*, pp. 102–3.
- 13 *Maqālīd*, p. 163.
- 14 *Maqālīd*, p. 103. Henry Corbin suggested as terms for the three worlds in the system of al-Sijistānī, *macrocosme*, *microcosme*, and *mesocosme* or *hierocosmos* (*Trilogie ismaélienne*, p. 20, note 29).
- 15 *Ithbāt*, p. 54.
- 16 *Ithbāt*, p. 77; *Maqālīd*, p. 103.
- 17 This is the title of the eighth chapter of the first section of his *Ithbāt*. Compare *Maqālīd*, p. 163, where mankind is described as the “best of creatures in formation and most equitable in composition.”
- 18 *Ithbāt*, pp. 30–37.
- 19 Although there really is no “history” to the species itself as noted already in chapter 9.
- 20 On the question of Adam and the imposition of law, see the intense controversy about this subject recorded in al-Kirmānī’s *Riyāḍ*, pp. 176–212. See al-Sijistānī’s *Yanābī’*, pp. 53–56, on the origin of the human species.

## 11 Prophecy, the deputy of intellect

- 1 A major exception is the chapter on the imamate in his *Ifṭikhār*.
- 2 This does not mean that he ignored all aspects of the imamate. This subject appears often enough within al-Sijistānī’s general discussions of the religious hierarchy, but the office of imam was subsumed within *nubūwa* and therefore taken up almost solely under that head. His inattention to the specific questions about the imamate does not

necessarily indicate doubt in his mind on this issue. As stated several times previously he confesses to the imamate (and messiahship) of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl and at the same time recognizes a special set of seven lieutenants (*khulafāʾ*). These authorities include without any doubt the early Fatimid caliphs. Thus loyalty, at least at the time he published those works which the later *daʿwa* saw fit to preserve, is not suspect.

- 3 The prophets “decorate” (*zayyana*) time, *Ithbāt*, p. 104.
- 4 *Ithbāt*, sixth chapter, fifth section (pp. 160–62) entitled, “That Because of Differing Circumstances the Messenger-prophets are More Than One.”
- 5 *Ithbāt*, p. 162. The very fact that the world is ruled by disparity (*tafāwut*) requires that prophecy exist, *Maqālīd*, p. 208.
- 6 A good example is the title of *iqḷīd* no. 51 (*Maqālīd*, pp. 182–88): “That People in Their Entirety Cannot Reach an Accord on One Single Law (*nāmūs*) but Having Them All Concur on True Knowledge is Possible.”
- 7 For some examples see the following: *aṣḥāb al-nawāmīs*, *Ithbāt*, p. 30; “*awḍāʾ*”, *Ithbāt*, p. 30, *Maqālīd*, pp. 183, 210; “*nāmūs*,” *Maqālīd*, p. 182; “*al-nāmūs al-waḍʾīʿ*”, *Maqālīd*, p. 182; “*nawāmīs*,” *iqḷīd* no. 51; “*wāḍīʿ al-awḍāʾ*,” *Ithbāt*, p. 42; “*wāḍīʿ al-nāmūs*,” *Iftikhār*, pp. 18, 44; “*al-siyāsa al-nāmūsīya*,” *Yanābīʿ*, p. 18.
- 8 Thus there cannot be only one, *Kashf*, VI: 5.
- 9 There is no doubt that for al-Sijistānī Islam is superior to all other religions. See *Ithbāt*, section III, chapter 12. The deeds (*aʿmāl*) of a prophet are his law. Since deeds must necessarily differ with changing circumstances, the power of their creators also differ. The efficacy of each law indicates the relative power of their authors (*Ithbāt*, p. 42).
- 10 One passage suggests that an imam possesses one sixth of the powers of the Preceder. The speaker–prophet has one half and the Founder one-third of the same powers (*Yanābīʿ*, p. 81).
- 11 *Maqālīd*, p. 197. The key term is *ūlūʾl-ʿazm* (“Those with the power of resolution and decision”) from *Qurʾān* 46: 35. According to al-Sijistānī, in contrast to Abū Ḥātim, only the *ūlūʾl-ʿazm* brought a law, *Maqālīd*, pp. 254–55.
- 12 Al-Sijistānī’s position is that he did not bring a law. See *Sullam*, p. 90. *Maqālīd*, pp. 254–55, as well as the discussion in the ninth section of al-Kirmānī’s *Riyāḍ*.
- 13 On this relationship and a Greek parallel concept, the *onomatothetys* and *nomothetys*, see Zimmermann, *Al-Farabī’s Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle’s De Interpretatione*, Oxford, 1981, p. 12 and note no. 4. That Adam knew all the names is explicitly recognised in the *Maqālīd*, p. 182.
- 14 *Maqālīd*, p. 270.
- 15 *Ithbāt*, pp. 117–18.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 172. The nations or territories that have never had a prophet are Sind, Hind (India), Sin (China), the Zanj, the Turks, the Khazars, and the Slavs. Only the region bounded by Mekka in the south and Syria and Jerusalem in the north has been the scene of prophecy.
- 18 Al-Sijistānī makes this point by implication. See for example chapter five of section five of the *Ithbāt*, pp. 156–59, on why prophecy never moves from lineage to lineage.
- 19 *Ithbāt*, p. 156.
- 20 See particularly *Ithbāt*, pp. 15–23, and *Maqālīd*, p. 120.
- 21 *Ithbāt*, p. 15.

- 22 “*Huwa al-insān al-ṣāfi al-mu’ayyad bi rūḥ al-quds*”, *Ithbāt*, pp. 119, 121.
- 23 *Yanābī’*, p. 36.
- 24 *Ifrikhār*, pp. 49–50, for example. No English word seems to translate fully the Arabic verb. It could be rendered “to support,” “to corroborate,” “to help,” “to authorize,” or even “to infuse.” The act of inspiring is *ta’yīd*; those inspired are *mu’ayyadūn*. In the *Qur’ān* God says of Jesus that “‘*ayyadnāhu bi rūḥ al-quds*.” According to the Ismailis all prophets at all levels are *mu’ayyadūn*.
- 25 On the *rūḥ al-quds*, see particularly *iqḷīd* no. 64, which has this concept as its theme.
- 26 *Ithbāt*, p. 149.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 29 *Ibid.*, section 5, chapter 3.
- 30 *Maqālīd*, p. 270. They know the secrets of nature, *Ifrikhār*, p. 58; of creation, *Ithbāt*, p. 64.
- 31 In one example he says, “*al-nāṭiq . . . huwa khalīfat al-sābiq fī al-‘ālam al-jismānī*” (*Yanābī’*, p. 72; also *Ithbāt*, p. 123) and in another “*kānat al-nubūwa khalīfat al-‘aql fī al-‘ālam al-jismānī*” (*Ithbāt*, p. 127).
- 32 *Ithbāt*, p. 98.
- 33 They rely on “material sensations” (*al-mahsūsāt al-hayūlāniya*), *Yanābī’*, p. 95. They reason sequentially from “premises and propositions” (*al-muqaddamāt wa al-qaḍāya*), *Ithbāt*, p. 170.
- 34 *Ithbāt*, pp. 53–54.
- 35 *Yanābī’*, p. 36; *Ithbāt*, pp. 53–54. A key term is *mu’tadil* or *i’tidāl*. For examples see *Ithbāt*, pp. 54, 55, 62, 110, 148; *Maqālīd*, p. 181; *Kashf*, pp. 28, 49.
- 36 *Maqālīd*, p. 270.
- 37 The relationship of temperament and receptivity was identified by Galen. See “Avicenna,” *Elranica*, p. 80.
- 38 *Ithbāt*, pp. 156–59 (5th chapter, 5th section entitled, “That Prophecy does not Cross from Lineage to Lineage”) *Maqālīd*, p. 5.
- 39 *Ithbāt*, p. 156.
- 40 See *Ithbāt*, p. 38, for a discussion of domination “*taskhīr*.” See also *Maqālīd*, p. 214.
- 41 *Maqālīd*, p. 179.
- 42 There is a direct connection between the terms *nuṭq* (articulate speech) and *nāṭiq* (speaking-prophet). This is explained in the *Tuhfa*, p. 143.
- 43 *Kashf*, p. 70; French, pp. 103–04.
- 44 *Ithbāt*, p. 153.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 46 *Maqālīd*, p. 270.
- 47 *Ithbāt*, pp. 132–33, 139.
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 110.
- 49 On the Ismaili doctrine of these three angelic beings, see Halm, *Kosmologie*, pp. 67–74, and 206–9 where he provides the text of al-Sijistānī’s chapter on them from his *Ifrikhār*.
- 50 *Ithbāt*, p. 148. The messenger-prophets (*rusul*) have the ability to create (*qādirīn ‘alā ikhtirā’āt*) the legal statutes (*al-awḍā’ al-nāmūsiya*), *Ithbāt*, p. 139.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 118, and to alter it by adding or subtracting.



- 54 Ibid.
- 55 *lqlīd* 68 of the *Maqālīd* has the title “Why Dissension and Conflict Occur in Their Respective Nations Following the Exit of Each *Nāṭiq*” (pp. 275–80). *Ithbāt*, p. 42; *Iftikhār*, p. 71; *Ithbāt*, pp. 128–29.
- 56 *Maqālīd*, p. 278.
- 57 His knowledge is dual (*al-‘ilmān*): *‘ilm al-malakūt wa ‘ilm al-bayān*.
- 58 For a different explanation of why prophets perform the function of teaching others – one closer to religious tradition – see *Ithbāt*, pp. 53–54.
- 59 The term *ta’līf* carries particular weight in al-Sijistānī’s theory of prophecy. Composing scripture, the act of a speaking or legislating prophet, a *nāṭiq*, is analogous to the act of soul in forming or structuring nature. The latter action is in Arabic *tarkīb*. The physical world is *murakkab*; scripture (and *sharī’a*) is *mu’allaf*.
- 60 *Ithbāt*, p. 56.
- 61 Ibid., p. 118.
- 62 Ibid., p. 118.
- 63 Ibid., p. 194. In place of intellect and soul the text actually uses *al-sābiq* and *al-tālī*.
- 64 *Ithbāt*, p. 125.
- 65 Examples: *Ithbāt*, pp. 64, 155, 161, 170–71, 177; *Kashf*, p. 82. Cf. *Maqālīd*, p. 283.
- 66 His *siyāsa*. On the types of *siyāsa*, see *Ithbāt*, p. 120. Note the reference to *al-siyāsa al-nāmūsīya* in *Yanābī’*, p. 18.
- 67 *Maqālīd*, p. 278.
- 68 *Ithbāt*, pp. 53–54.
- 69 *Maqālīd*, p. 278: “Since each *sharī’a* is a part of an absolute *sharī’a* that regulates both realms (*al-dārayn*) but then the absolute *sharī’a* is found to have its particular conditions diversified – that is, each single *sharī’a* relates to the period that occasioned it according to what existed at that time – it follows necessarily that the adherents of each *sharī’a* will differ in their opinions in respect to the time of each of the leaders in the community or that of its jurists and scholars. Thus the case for the part resembles that of the whole and differences with regard to a single *sharī’a* aid reasonable men in searching for its real truths.”

## 12 Interpretation and its institution

- 1 This verse readily admits that the scripture contains both. Quoted above, Part I, chapter 2, p. 27.
- 2 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 14; English trans. by G. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, Luzac, 1976), p. 50. See Hourani’s note no. 62.
- 3 For the Imami Shiah, as well, the rules of *uṣūl al-dīn* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence) provide the necessary explanations of scripture and legal ordinances on the basis of reason and logic as well as other sources. The Ismailis did not adopt a comparative theory of *uṣūl*.
- 4 On the office of the *waṣī* (the *wiṣāya*), see chapter 7 of the *Iftikhār*.
- 5 The role of Founder is “embedded in the soul of the speaker-prophet” (*mustajanna fī naṣf al-nāṭiq*), *Maqālīd*, p. 191.
- 6 *Yanābī’*, pp. 72, 81.
- 7 *Maqālīd*, p. 191.
- 8 The *waṣī* and the imams do not have the function of *risāla*, see *Ithbāt*, p. 173.
- 9 Although frequently supported by Scripture and an occasional Report (*ḥadīth*,

*khavar*) from the Prophet. Lack of credit to contemporary imams might indicate an unwillingness to anchor his pronouncements to a single imam but it may also have something to do with the office of *lāhiq*, which al-Sijistānī may have held and which could have had powers analogous to those of the imam.

10 *Maqālīd*, pp. 188–96 (*iqḷīd* no. 52).

11 *Maqālīd*, p. 189.

12 *Ibid.*

13 See also *Maqālīd*, pp. 66–67; *Ithbāt*, V: 3.

14 On the use of the root *awwala* and the term *mu'awwil*, see also *Ithbāt*, p. 137.

15 The “*ḥarakat al-mu'awwil*,” *Maqālīd*, p. 189.

16 On *ḥaqā'iq* and ‘ulūm, see *Maqālīd*, pp. 228, 282. “The truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) hidden in the word and the law,” *Maqālīd*, p. 275.

17 *Ithbāt*, p. 110.

18 Translation Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, p. 51.

19 *Maqālīd*, p. 191.

20 *Sullam*, p. 45. Pages 41–51 of this work are a discussion of the problem of the *mutashābihāt*.

21 *Maqālīd*, pp. 203–9, which is *iqḷīd* no. 54 entitled as a whole “*fī al-mutashābih*” (“On the Ambiguous”). In it he recounts a whole list of items of such “obvious” ambiguity.

22 *Maqālīd*, p. 196.

23 See *Sullam*, pp. 46–51.

24 *Iftikhār*, p. 20.

25 *Maqālīd*, pp. 245–46. In this passage al-Sijistānī explains that the lawgiver (*wāḍi' al-sharī'a*) knows all of the *ḥaqā'iq*. For the rest he uses a different language. The lawgiver is “more knowledgeable than” (*a'raf min*) the rest. The *waṣī* is “more discerning of it” (*abṣar bihā*). The imam “knows better than the community in its entirety” (*‘ālim min al-umma bi-aṣrihā*).

26 *Maqālīd*, p. 245.

27 “*Al-sharī'atu badhru al-'ulūm wa'l-ḥaqā'iq*,” *Maqālīd*, p. 278. A parallel concept from Plotinus may be his notion of the *sperma* and the *spermatikos* (*Enneads* III, 3, 7; Cf. *Israeli*, p. 157).

28 *Maqālīd*, pp. 228–29.

29 Compare Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-ta'wil* and *Ta'wil al-da'ā'im*. It is interesting that, unlike Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, al-Sijistānī never singled out this subject for a separate treatise but always includes it within a larger context.

30 This is the list given by al-Sijistānī in his *Maqālīd*, p. 259.

31 See among other references *Sullam*, p. 4, in which al-Sijistānī mentions his own *ta'yīd* from God.

32 For additional material on the definition of *mutashābiha*, see *Iftikhār*, p. 56; *Ithbāt*, p. 178; *Sullam*, pp. 32–33, 41; *Maqālīd*, pp. 203, 232, 268, 94–95 and *iqḷīd* no. 52.

33 Example: *Iftikhār*, p. 56.

34 *Maqālīd*, pp. 194–95; *Iftikhār*, p. 29 (Poonawala), 34 (Poonawala), 70.

35 *Maqālīd*, pp. 188–96 (*iqḷīd* no. 52).

36 In this context it is important to remember that prophecy provides knowledge of more than sacred scripture and spiritual matters. The prophets read the book of nature as well. See for example *Ithbāt* V: 3.

37 *Maqālīd*, p. 196.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

- 39 For example, *Maqālīd*, pp. 224–25, 189.
- 40 Ibid., p. 245.
- 41 Ibid., p. 231.
- 42 *Iqlīd* no. 63 (pp. 244–49): “*Fī anna al-wuqūf ‘alā al-ḥaqā’ iḡ fī al-sharā’i’ lā yusqīṭu ‘an al-a’ māl.*” See also *Ithbāt*, pp. 50, 53.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Example, *Iftikhār*, p. 30; *Maqālīd*, p. 194.
- 45 *Iqlīd* no. 59 (pp. 229–32) of *Maqālīd* has the title: “The Law (*sharī’a*) Cannot Suffice by Itself nor Stand Alone without the Hidden Truths (*al-‘ulūm al-ḥaqīqīya*) Within It” (*fī anna al-sharī’ata ghayru muktafiyatin bi-dhātihā wa lā mustaghniyati ‘ammā sutira taḥtāhā min al-‘ulūm al-ḥaqīqīya*).
- 46 *Ithbāt*, pp. 30, 56.

### 13 Salvation and the womb of history

- 1 Madelung first called attention to this distinction in his study “Abū Ya’qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis,” *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater (Textes et Memoires Volume XVI)* (Leiden, Brill, 1990), p. 135.
- 2 *Iftikhār*, chapter 9 (on *qiyāma*) and 10 (on *ba’th*). Both, however, are most concerned with rejecting the position of his opponents rather than explaining his own.
- 3 Particularly a section that seems to examine various problems of the soul (*iqlīds* nos. 33–45).
- 4 A number of key passages are obviously so far missing. Al-Sijistānī himself reports in his *Iftikhār* (p. 88) that the proof for salvation after death (*ba’th ba’d al-mawt*) was given in his *Bishāra*, a work not yet recovered. However, what he says about the missing passage is fairly definitive.

In our book *al-Bishāra*, we applied ourselves to the refutation of those who reject salvation after death and, by means of brilliant demonstrative arguments that prove it, set out what will allow no one henceforth a point of contention against the People of Truth.

(Unfortunately the fragmentary quotations from *al-Bishāra* in Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī’s *Kanz al-walad* – interspersed between pages 248 and 264 of Ghalib’s edition – are too mixed with other material to reliably indicate al-Sijistānī’s own position.)

- 5 Madelung suggested “resuscitation” or “rebirth” but neither one seems to fit what I think al-Sijistānī intends. Significantly both of these translations promote the necessity of metempsychosis.
- 6 He is, of course, making this connection, in part, because the Arabic words *qā’im* and *qiyāma* derive from the same root.
- 7 “*Ma’āduhā wa marja’uhā ilā ma’danihā*,” *Ithbāt*, p. 105.
- 8 The “*yawm al-ḥisāb*,” “Day of Reckoning,” *Ithbāt*, p. 166. A good deal of al-Sijistānī’s surviving comments about *qiyāma* concern the folly in understanding this event as literally described in scripture. This is particularly true of his *al-Risāla al-bāhira* and the chapter on *qiyāma* in *al-Iftikhār*.
- 9 On the “invisible form,” see *Yanābī’*, pp. 67, 83–84. This form once released becomes the “sublime form,” *Yanābī’*, pp. 2, 83–84, 89. Cf. *Maqālīd*, p. 197; *Ithbāt*, pp. 103, 109. Is the inner man identical with the *huwīyat al-insān* of *Iftikhār*, p. 87?
- 10 Nature must exist in order for man to exist; and man must exist in order for the

*mu' ayyadūn bi rūḥ al-quḍs* to exist. Because of the speaker-prophets, the soul is able to move from potentiality to actuality, *Maqālīd*, pp. 120–21.

- 11 "Since it is false that resurrection is as imagined by the literalists – that is, to consist of the alteration of the order of creation and its annihilation – the opposite is necessarily true," *Iftikhār*, p. 74.
- 12 *Yanābī'*, pp. 65–67, *yanbū'* no. 27, entitled, "That the Reward is Knowledge."
- 13 *Maqālīd*, pp. 140–45 (*iqḷīd* no. 40, entitled "That Salvation is for Spirits and not Bodies Which Perish and Decay" (*fī anna al-ba'th li-l-arwāḥ lā li-l-ajsād al-mutalāsīya al-mutabaddida*).
- 14 *Maqālīd*, p. 140.
- 15 *Maqālīd*, p. 143.
- 16 *Maqālīd*, pp. 143–45.
- 17 Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī. *Kitāb al-Bīrūnī fī taḥqīq mā li-l-hind*. Revised, India, 1958, p. 49; English trans. by E. C. Sachau, Delhi, 1964, pp. 64–65. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirin*, pp. 421–22 and *Khawān al-ikhwān*, ed. Qawim, pp. 132–33, 135, 138–39. On this subject see also P. Walker, "The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams* (eds. Hallaq and Little, Leiden, Brill, 1991), pp. 215–34 and W. Madelung, "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis."
- 18 *Riyād*, p. 93.
- 19 *Maqālīd*, pp. 154–59, "*Fī anna al-tanāsukh bāṭil*." For a more detailed description see Walker, "The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam," pp. 215–34.
- 20 *Maqālīd*, p. 171.
- 21 *Yanābī'*, p. 45.
- 22 On *barzakh* (limbo, purgatory), see the remarks of Madelung concerning al-Sijistānī's *al-Bāhira*, "Metempsychosis," pp. 138–39.
- 23 "*Mab'ūth lāḥiq bi-huwīyat al-insān al-ladhī huwa jawhar al-bāqī*," *Iftikhār*, p. 87.
- 24 *Maqālīd*, p. 173.
- 25 *Yanābī'*, pp. 69–70.
- 26 More than anything the Philosophers, he claims, object to *qiyāma*, *Iftikhār*, pp. 74, 77.
- 27 *Ithbāt*, p. 131.
- 28 This is the subject of the 2nd chapter of the 6th section of the *Iftikhār*. See also the first *faṣl* of the *Kashf* and also *Kashf*, pp. 87–88.
- 29 *Ithbāt*, p. 131; *Yanābī'*, p. 73. Cf. Tamer, ed. *Shajara*, p. 12.
- 30 Mention of these imams occurs in several places. For example: *Maqālīd*, p. 192; *Sullam*, p. 57.
- 31 *Ithbāt*, p. 131. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl is the "*Ṣāḥib al-kawr*," *Sullam*, p. 57.
- 32 *Maqālīd*, p. 192, states "... when one of them [the imams in the line of Husayn] left the world [meaning here going into occultation, *ghayba*], there remained someone from his progeny (*ṣulbihi*) to substitute in his place."
- 33 The *sab' mathānī* are mentioned in the *Sullam*, p. 4. For al-Kirmānī, see his *al-Risāla al-waḍī'a*, f. 30r.
- 34 *Ithbāt*, p. 153; *Iftikhār*, pp. 82, 83, 84.
- 35 There are two important exceptions concerning the *qiyāma* itself. These are the *Kashf al-mahjūb*, the seventh section of which covers the theme of *bar angikhtan* (on which see the study of Madelung, "Metempsychosis") and *al-Bāhira*. Neither of these works have been analyzed specifically in relation to the main body of al-Sijistānī's writing.
- 36 *Ithbāt*, p. 155.

- 37 *Al-Bishāra*, cited in *Iftikhār*, p. 82.
- 38 On this see also P. Walker, "Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Ismaili Thought."
- 39 *Maqālīd*, pp. 266–67. *Iqlīd* no. 66 (pp. 264–70) is entitled "*fī anna al-īmān lā yakūn illā bi-l-‘ilm.*"
- 40 *Maqālīd*, p. 243.
- 41 *Iftikhār*, pp. 117–18.
- 42 Just as there is no *ba‘th* for the body since it would require a temporal *ba‘th* – a contradiction in terms, *Maqālīd*, p. 142.
- 43 *Yanābī‘*, p. 84.
- 44 *Maqālīd*, p. 213.
- 45 *Ithbāt*, p. 35.
- 46 *Maqālīd*, pp. 120–21; *Yanābī‘*, p. 50.

### Epilogue: the use and control of reason

- 1 These were the philosophers named, in this context, by Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī in his *A‘lām al-nubūwa*. See again Part I, chapter 3.
- 2 At large the process of acquiring philosophy was exemplified by four major trends all of which may be defined in reference to the conflict between revelation and philosophy. These are the following: (a) that represented by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī who rejected prophetic knowledge; (b) that of al-Fārābī who accepted the universality and supremacy of philosophy but without rejecting revelation or religion; (c) that of writers like Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ expressing neutrality in the conflict between religion and philosophy, a position that led to a non-pejorative accommodation of both; and (d) finally an ambiguous position that rejects and accepts philosophy, both at the same time. The last of these is the position of the Ismaili writers.
- 3 Edited by Moḥammed Hasan al-‘Azami, 3 volumes, Cairo, Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1972.

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